PlayStation 3 PlayStation Portable PlayStation Network PlayStation 2

PlayStation® The Official Magazine

MAY 09

PlayStation - The Official Magazine Issue 19 (May 2009)

WORLD EXCLUSIVE

NINJA GAIDEN SIGMA 2

New modes! New bosses! New playable characters!

GOD of WAR III
Our 11-page blowout breaks it down

SNEAK PEEK
Square Enix's brand new game

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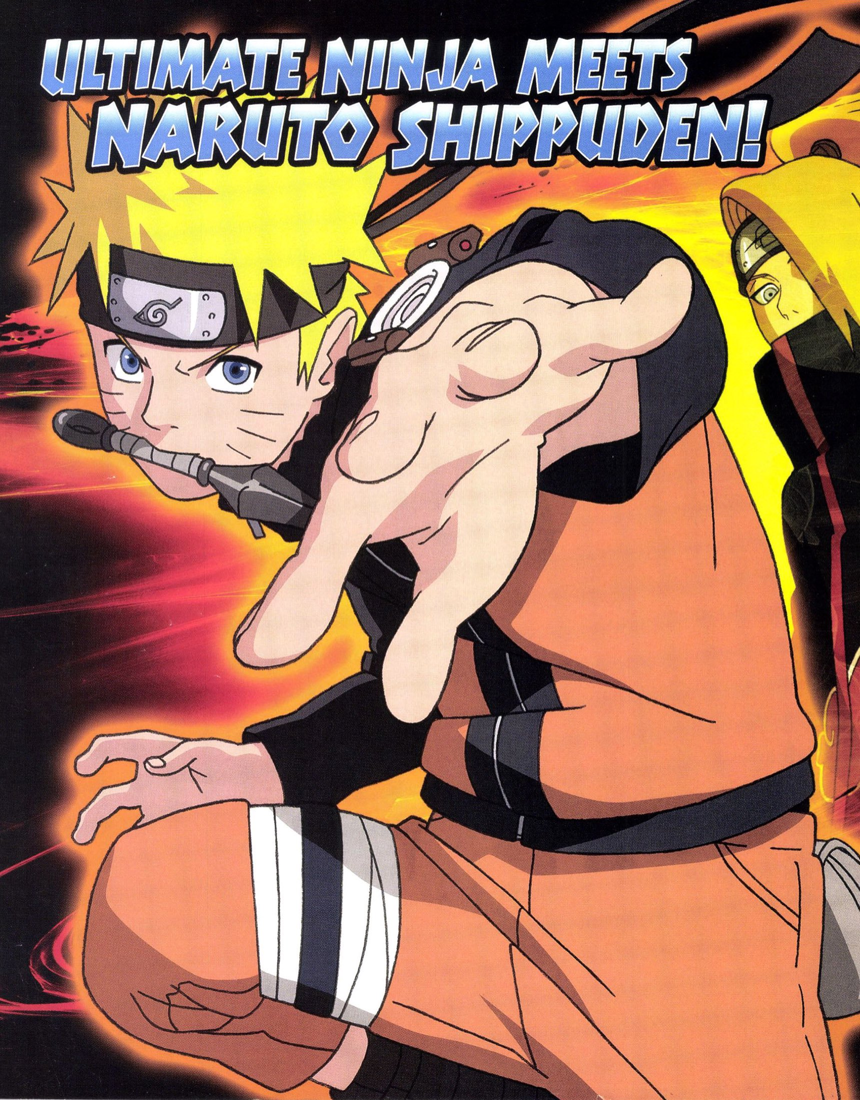
ULTIMATE NINJA MEETS NARUTO SHIPPUDEN!



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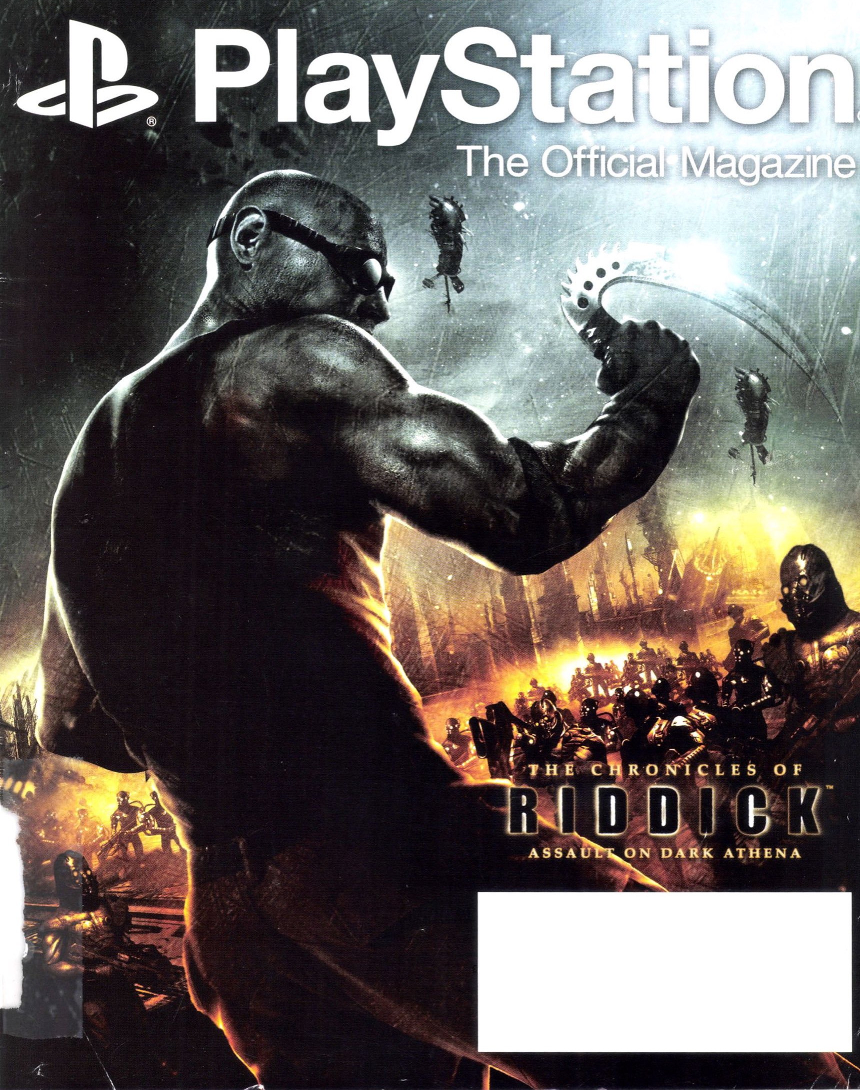
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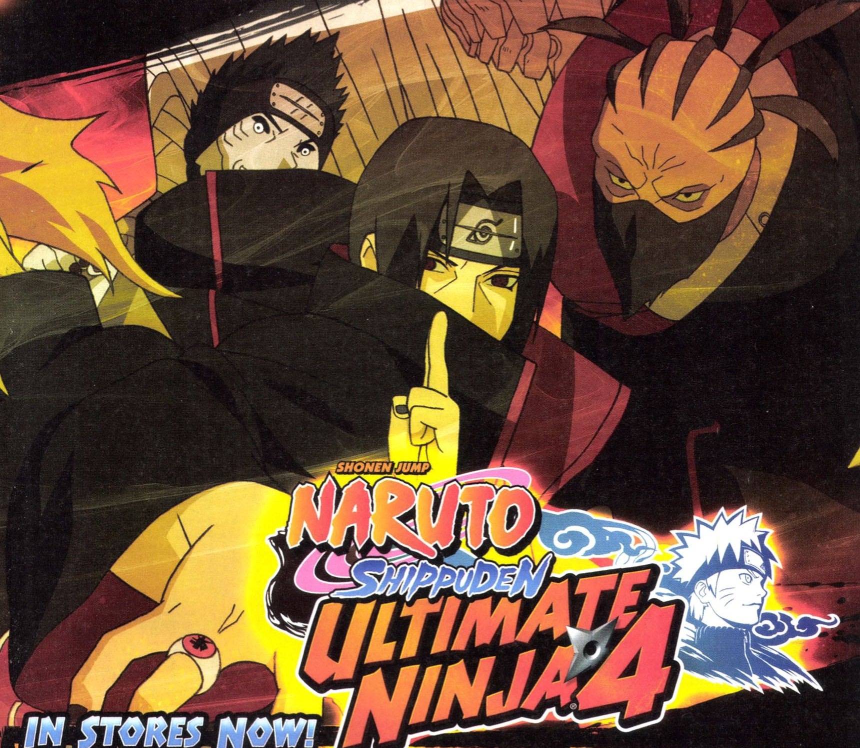

SHONEN JUMP

NARUTO SHIPPUDEN ULTIMATE NINJA® 4

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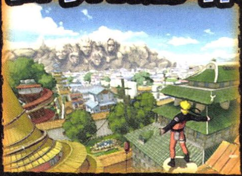

EXPLORE THE MASSIVE WORLD OF NARUTO SHIPPUDEN!

ITACHI
NARUTO
ULTIMATE
JUTSU

UNLEASH NEW ULTIMATE JUTSU!

93
DEIDARA
NARUTO

MASTER THE LARGEST ROSTER OF NINJAS THAT ARE MORE MATURE AND POWERFUL!

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TEEN
T
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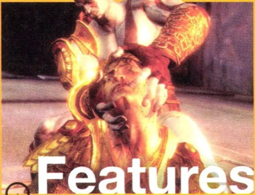
Contents

May 2009 **PlayStation** The Official Magazine

🟥 PlayStation 3 ☐ PlayStation Portable 🟩 PlayStation Network 🟦 PlayStation 2

Pirates versus Ninjas?! Do you really believe some drunken outlaw sailor has any chance against *this*?



Features

44 **GOD OF WAR III**
Breaking it down: We dissect the game (so far) as thoroughly as Kratos destroys enemies

58 **NINJA GAIDEN SIGMA 2**
New modes, new characters, new bosses in this PS3 exclusive

66 **MLB 09: THE SHOW VS. MLB 2K9**
The ultimate baseball head-to-head... Find out which game takes home the championship trophy

70 **30 AWESOME THINGS TO DO IN KILLZONE 2**
If you haven't done all 30, you haven't played *Killzone 2*

Update

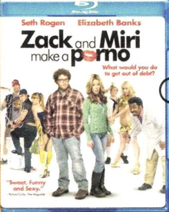
6 The 10: What you need to know

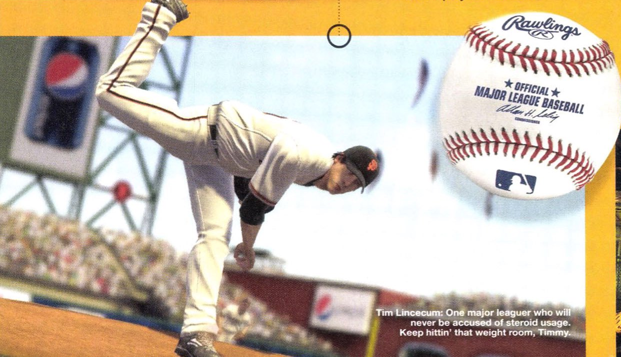
12 A chat with *Resident Evil 5* producer Masachika Kawata

19 Sneak a peek at Square Enix's new game

19 Et Cetera

20 **BLU-RAY REVIEWS**


Seth Rogen
Elizabeth Banks
Zack and Miri make a porno
What would you do to get out of debt?
"Sweet, Funny and Sexy."


Rawlings
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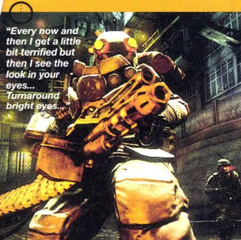
MAJOR LEAGUE BASEBALL

Tim Lincecum: One major leaguer who will never be accused of steroid usage. Keep hittin' that weight room, Timmy.



"Every now and then I get a little bit terrified but then I see the look in your eyes... Turnaround bright eyes..."

"I was *such* a nerd in high school! But then I started working out, lost some weight, turned evil..."

In retrospect, resistance *was* futile. Trendy glowing eyes swept the gaming world, nearly finishing us off.

"And *that* is for asking, YET AGAIN, why Angelina Jolie's not in the game..."

Previews

30 **BLAZBLUE: CALAMITY TRIGGER**

38 Dante's Inferno

26 Just Cause 2

34 Katamari Forever

28 Need for Speed SHIFT

32 **OVERLORD 2**

40 Pangya

36 Scratch: The Ultimate DJ

40 Tekken 6

Reviews

80 Chronicles of Riddick: Assault on Dark Athena

85 Dragonball: Evolution

84 Eat Lead: The Return of Matt Hazard

85 Prinny: Can I Really Be the Hero?

78 **RESISTANCE RETRIBUTION**

83 Tom Clancy's HAWX

76 **WANTED: WEAPONS OF FATE**

82 **WATCHMEN: THE END IS NIGH**

Network

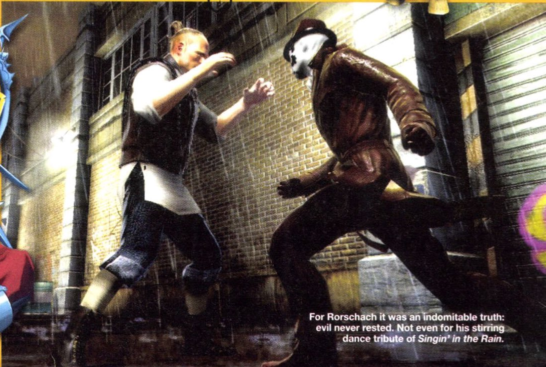
86 **LITTLEBIGPLANET**
14 tips to ensure *your* level gets noticed

90 PlayStation Network Corner
Reviews, previews, downloads, and a behind-the-scenes look at the Video Delivery Service

92 Letters

96 Free Qore code

"Well Kratos, according to my mom, you guys met while you were on shore leave in Greece..."



For Rorschach it was an indomitable truth: evil never rested. Not even for his stirring dance tribute of *Singin' in the Rain*.

Editor's Note

"So you're the one who calls me up every single day of my life with special offers?"

We just hit March as I write this, and still no word of a price cut to the PS3. Sony faces significant issues at a corporate level that has resulted in layoffs in various groups and internal restructuring. So maybe, amid an unprecedented global economic meltdown, where disposable income and discretionary spending dollars are at the lowest point we've ever known, it's not fiscally responsible to drop the price. That's a shame because I don't believe anyone would argue that a lower price point would encourage more system-buyers, especially with the line-up of games on the horizon.

But I'm curious: if you have friends who have yet to board the good ship PS3, what arguments are you using to persuade them that their investment would garner the best entertainment value possible? Are you upselling the games (which ones?), the technology (Blu-ray still crucial?), the improving online environment (Home and the PlayStation Store?)?

The most significant announcements coming out of SCEA's Destination PlayStation (summarized on page 14) surrounded the PSP, clearly a concerted effort to rejuvenate the handheld's relevance. So same consideration to you PSP owners: is it the games or additional features (Skype, remote play) getting you giddy? Out in the real world, on forums or among friends, in the personal PR that you perform in your role as committed platform fans, as its opinion leaders, what's your message?

Let me know at the usual address **(PTOM_editor@futureus.com)** and I'm sure there will be some junk lying around my desk that would look great cluttering your home for the most thoughtful and considered insight.

> "I don't believe anyone would argue that a lower price point would encourage more system-buyers, especially with the line-up of games on the horizon."

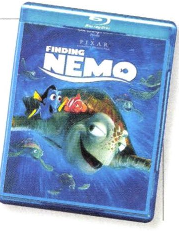
Consider it while you browse some of the spectacular games coming to PS3 showcased in this issue. Right around now, between the likes of Tecmo's stunning *Ninja Gaiden Sigma 2* (page 58) and SCEA's own much-anticipated *God of War III* (page 44), we're really starting to see the separation in graphical ability and gameplay dynamics afforded by the power of the Cell processor. For the former, we sent Scott on his first trip east—to Tecmo's Team Ninja studio—to get the latest on the PS3 exclusive action game coming from a storied studio making its own headlines in recent months. For the latter, we couldn't use the same vocabulary that series creator David Jaffe provided to describe Kratos' latest adventure, so instead turned to the more family-friendly musings of Teresa to ensure you know everything we do about the biggest game coming to the PS3 this year.

Let me know what you think, and remember that junk/fascinating gaming ephemera from my desk could wing its way to you for your thoughts and observations!

Rob

"Quote" contest

Hundreds of you recognized last month's line from the greatest animated movie of all time—yeah, I said it—*Finding Nemo*. So from all those entries, David Leech of Loveland, CO has to consider himself extraordinarily fortunate to be the first out of the proverbial hat. He'll receive a random Blu-ray movie from the office vault. Can you be as lucky as David? Just identify the movie quote at the top of this page, and send your entry, along with your full mailing address, to **PTOM_editor@futureus.com,** with the words Ed Note May in the Subject line. And while you're at it, include some thoughts on the state of the PlayStation nation, on PTOM, on whatever's on your mind—the cost of the email is still the same!



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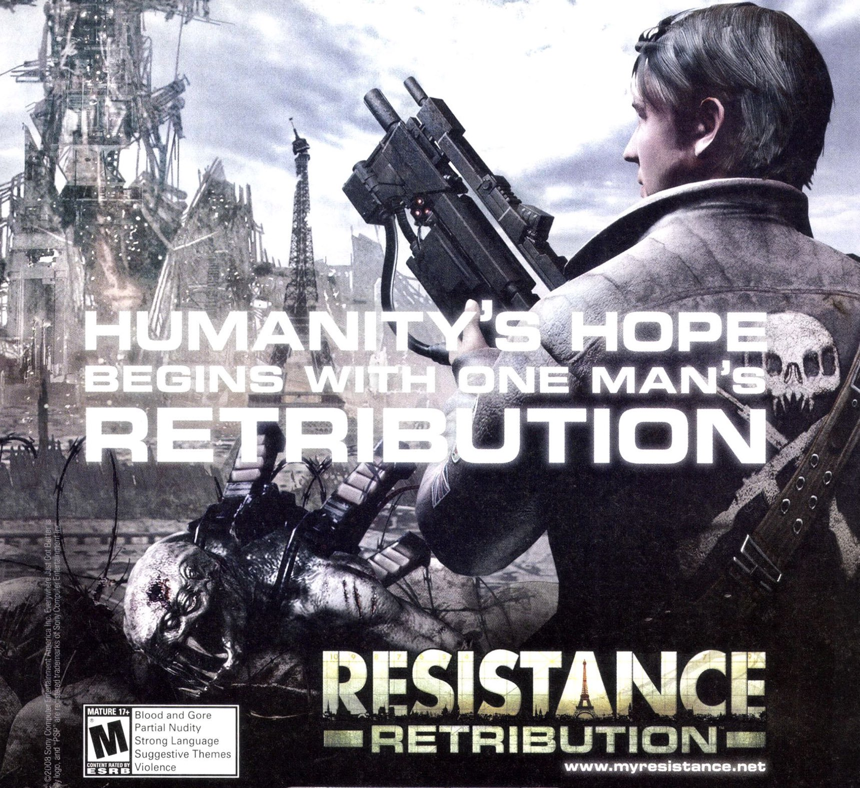

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THE 10

What you need to know

2 A Sackful of *LittleBigPlanet* page 8

3 Drink 'em if you got 'em page 9

4 The skinny on PS3 skins page 10

5 PTOM Interview: Masachika Kawata page 12

6 Destination PlayStation news page 14

7 Kristin Kreuk. 'nuff said page 15

8 Earn while you spend—*sweet!* page 16

9 Hardware: We strap on stuff page 18

10 Square Enix's new game! page 19

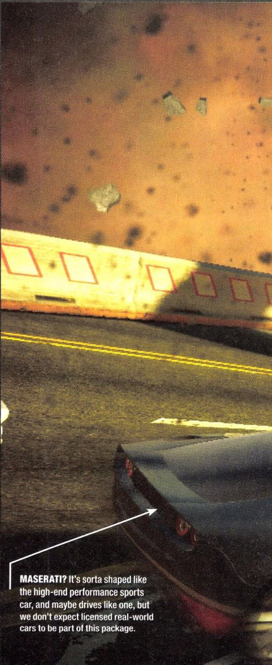
1

A *Pure* Follow-up gets Destructive

Stop me if you've heard this one: a reality TV show stars race drivers in a crazy-destructible environment, tuned for gratuitous explosions amid precision wheelman expertise. Ratings gold.

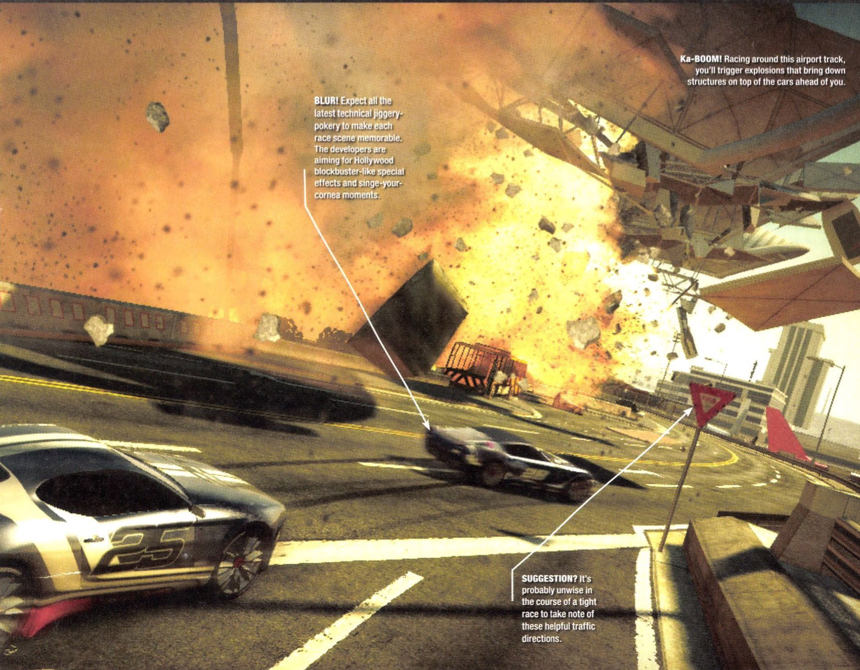
You drive, you dodge, you take out opponents under crumbling bridges and buildings, and turn 'em black 'n' crispy through flaming debris.

Sounds good. Sounds better when you know the team behind the spectacular trailer and explosive concept for *Split Second* is the one that crafted PTOM office favorite, the supremely playable and unabashedly fun ATV racer, *Pure.* If you recall SEGA's attempts at this destructible racing concept with *Full Auto,* you may really think you've heard this one before; but we're hopeful that increased understanding of the PS3 hardware, paired with developer Black Rock Studio's clear understanding of the concept of fun gameplay, will make for the kind of racer that can lay claim to *Burnout's* destructive arcade racer crown.



MASERATI? It's sorta shaped like the high-end performance sports car, and maybe drives like one, but we don't expect licensed real-world cars to be part of this package.

GIVE US A SPLIT SECOND



Ka-BOOM! Racing around this airport track, you'll trigger explosions that bring down structures on top of the cars ahead of you.

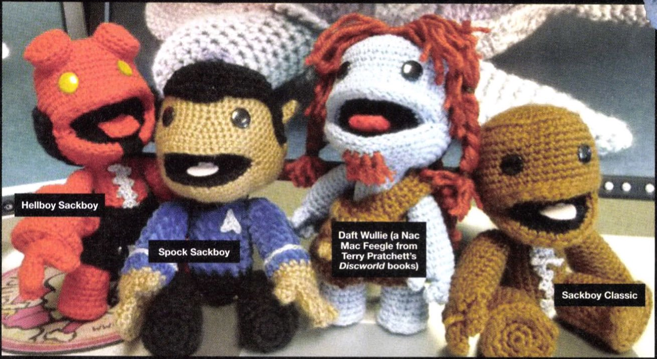
BLUR! Expect all the latest technical jiggery-pokery to make each race scene memorable. The developers are aiming for Hollywood blockbuster-like special effects and singe-your-cornea moments.

SUGGESTION? It's probably unwise in the course of a tight race to take note of these helpful traffic directions.

GETTING THE SACK 2

Official and unofficial *LittleBigPlanet* merchandise

Maggie Wang has a talent. She can create deliciously adorable custom Sackboys, and she'll do it for you...for a price. Each doll takes her four to eight hours to create and will cost you between $30 and $50, depending on the complexity and materials. And at approximately eight-inches tall, the toys are both huggable and smoochable. Contact Maggie at **http://maggiewang.com/contact-maggie** to send your kudos or submit your order.


Hellboy Sackboy
Spock Sackboy
Daft Wullie (a Nac Mac Feegle from Terry Pratchett's *Discworld* books)
Sackboy Classic

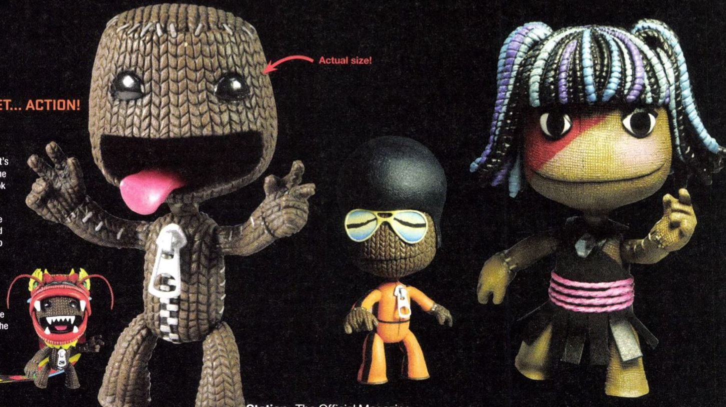
WHAT'S THE STRANGEST REQUEST YOU'VE RECEIVED?

"People have requested lots of videogame characters (Kratos, Solid Snake, Big Daddy, the entire casts of *Final Fantasy* and *Street Fighter*) and a few other characters (David Bowie's character from *Labyrinth*, Dwight from *The Office*). Several people also inquired about having dolls made to look like themselves, their pets, or their significant others. I think the one I like the best is a regular Sackboy wearing a big strawberry costume like a Fruit of the Loom guy"

– Maggie Wang

LIGHTS...PLANET... ACTION!

Emphasis on the little in *LBP*...these official Mezco *LBP* action figures are only four-inches tall! (Funny, that's exactly how big we'd imagine them based on how they look in the game.) Come spring, the figurines pictured (plus a few more) will be available at select retailers for around 10 to 15 bucks. Later, Mezco plans to release a full range of Sackboy action figures, some up to 18-inches tall. (Check **www.mezcotoyz.com** for details.) But that's not all—stay tuned, because official *LBP* plushies are in the works...finally!


Actual size!

3

VIAL-TALITY

PTOM hits the bottle in search of a performance-enhancing edge

Designed with the gamer in mind, Harcos' Mana and Health potions are shot-size energy drinks that pack a powerful dose of vitamins along with as much caffeine as two cans of Red Bull or four cups of coffee. Mana focuses on priming you for competition, while Health offers a post-action recharge with an infusion of Elderberry, ginseng, biotin, and folic acid.

In the interest of science, Team PTOM put the potions to the test under real-world gaming conditions. Um... except for Teresa who compulsively reads labels and has an unhealthy fixation on her...health (directed by that well known M.D., Dr. Internet). But less abnormal gamers can play along by picking up the potions at Fry's Electronics, Hot Topic, and other select retailers, or by ordering direct from **www.manapotions.com.**

ROB: Despite every night being a late one, despite a need for the occasional pick-me-up, I've never turned to the energy drink... Until it came as Health and Mana. That's the game dork in me speaking from the tired zone.

	HEALTH ENERGY POTION ✓	MANA ENERGY POTION
TASTE	Any red-colored liquid tastes better than any blue-colored liquid. It's one of nature's most indisputable laws. This one went down fine, leaving an aftertaste that reminded me of powdered vitamin C.	Half a pound of sugar [strangely, the potions contain no sugar] diluted in a thimble of water. Seriously, I thought my throat was going to constrict as an automatic self-preservation response.
UPSHOT	I'm pretty sure it helped me stay awake. Problem was, it didn't help my mental agility. It was like a fog layer descended over the tiredness, obscuring it from my senses, but not allowing in any...sense.	Once I got beyond the hideous taste, it did feel like the Mana potion succeeded in picking me up. But it didn't help my gaming, as despite being juiced, I lost badly to Ken in our daily *FIFA* match-up.

TERESA: Unlike some editors who assault their bodies on a daily basis with unnatural chemicals, I'm more careful about what I imbibe. Four coffee cups worth of caffeine in one gulp? No thanks! But I'll take a whiff and admire the packaging.

	HEALTH ENERGY POTION ✗	MANA ENERGY POTION ✗
SCENT	Blood, sweat, and tears; everything that you need to earn back your precious health points. Just kidding. I can't tell what it smells like. Maybe like a prune? Or a Fig Newton? It's a bit...spicy.	Sugar, artificial flavoring, and everything else I loved as a kid. If it were a perfume, I'd think about wearing it, but I heard guys prefer the scent of apple pie to the sickly sweet smell of Kool-Aid.
GUISE	It's red, with a trace of orange. I ripped off the wrappings and put both bottles on my shelf. Looks-wise, I prefer the Health potion, but I think someone drank some when I wasn't looking!	In the light, it's a pretty teal-blue. Out of the light, it's a murky green. Personally, I'd expect a Mana potion to have sparkles inside...and glitter, in the shape of little stars.

ROGER: I'm not usually a fan of energy drinks; especially when they come in super-sized, calorie-packed doses. But at 25 calories a pop, these energy potions make an easily rationalized supplement to my standard caffeine transfusions of coffee and Diet Cokes.

	HEALTH ENERGY POTION	MANA ENERGY POTION ✓
TASTE	Ever notice that cherry-flavored anything doesn't taste like any real cherry you've ever eaten? This is the apple-cinnamon equivalent. But it's sweet, fruity, and there's no discernible aftertaste, making it easy to swill.	Like drinking a non-frozen, lime-flavored Otter Pop with a kicker of sour. Strangely yummy and addictive, and the way it shrivels my tongue makes me feel like I've imbibed something magical.
UPSHOT	I'll admit that my blood is probably comprised of 50-percent caffeine, but I fell asleep *one hour* after taking the Health potion. I did feel restored after my nap though.	I was fighting off a cold when I tested the Mana potion. After about 10 minutes, I was back on my game. Your results may vary, but thanks, Mana, for the pick-me-up!

SCOTT: I'm not much of a caffeine junkie, but I've tried quite a few energy drinks over the years and, in general, I enjoy them. My reactions have ranged from shaky hands and stomachaches to absolutely no noticeable impact, so I wasn't sure how these drinks would affect me.

	HEALTH ENERGY POTION	MANA ENERGY POTION ✓
TASTE	I can't quite identify what this tastes like, but "apple-cinnamon" definitely isn't the first flavor that jumps to mind. Maybe if you mixed that with children's cough syrup...still, it could certainly be worse.	Roger basically hit the nail on the head: this tastes like the lime-flavored syrup you'd pour over a snow cone...and it's kind of delicious. If you can handle super sweetness, this might appeal to you.
UPSHOT	Instead of taking a nap at work at 3:00 in the afternoon, I drank one of these, and you know what? It actually worked! I felt noticeably less tired without getting all jittery and sick. Excellent.	The initial burst might have been a little more noticeable, but honestly, I felt the same after drinking this as I did after drinking the Health potion. That's not a bad thing though!

4

GIVE ME SOME SKIN

Mad style for your PS3 from Decal Girl, Mad Catz, and SkinIt

Black is slimming, but color shows personality. And PTOM of course *craves* personality. So we did some digging to find the best way to put our marks on our PS3s. Surprisingly, not many websites offer PS3 skins (or they're knock-offs or resellers of the same few brands). But we did find a few that we liked. We got them into the office, scrutinized them, and then had Qore host Veronica Belmont's hands pose with them so we could share our findings with you.

GETTING SKIN

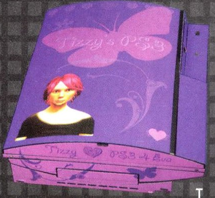
Decal Girl
www.decalgirl.com
Price: $14.99, $4 per controller skin
The variety and the prices are decent. Our current go-to site for PS3 skins. The designs on this page (labeled A through E) are all Decal Girl designs.

THE PS3 SKINNY

QUIZ TIME. We've got a few spare Decal Girl PS3 skins. If you can match the five PS3 skins displayed on this page (labeled A through E) with their respective owners from the PTOM staff (Rob, Roger, Ken, Teresa, and Scott) we might send you one. Email your answers to **PTOM_Letters@futureus.com** with the Subject line Decal Quiz. We'll randomly select three winners on July 1, 2009. Hint: some are obvious and some only *seem* obvious. Good luck!

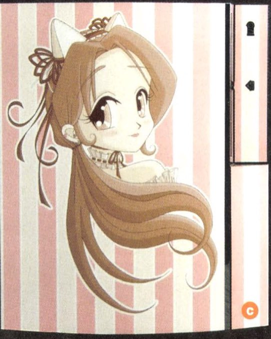
Fightin' MadCatz

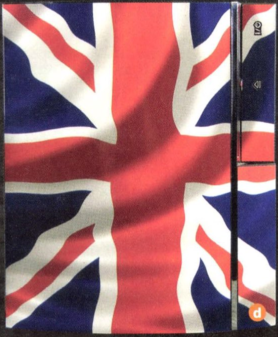
MadCatz's limited edition Official *Street Fighter IV* Controller Faceplate and Console Skinz ($29.99) bundles a skin with a complementing hard plate that slips over your PS3 controller. We were a bit disappointed that the packaging caused some creases and wrinkles in the skin, but if you're a fan of *Street Fighter IV* and controller faceplates, the skin is practically a free bonus.

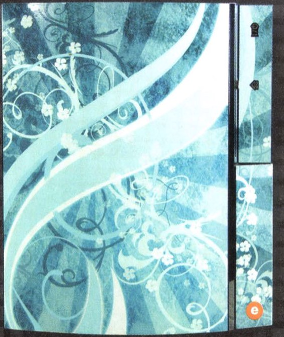


Don't Forget Tizzy!

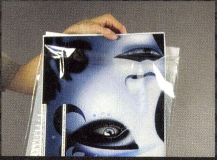
If you want to design a skin yourself, SkinIt's skin creation tool is just what you need. Tizzy designed her own skin online—with hearts, some deep thoughts, and a not-at-all self-absorbed photo—then waited a week to get the package in the mail. Not bad! But beware: the service reflects the talents of the creator. The custom skin ($34.95) covers two sides of your PS3. If you're scared, you can try SkinIt's pre-made designs (at a pricier $39.99) but the site doesn't allow you to preview the designs on a PS3, so it's also risky!







ANALYSIS OF A DECAL GIRL SKIN

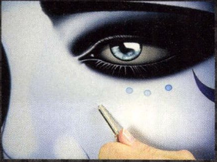


1 A single sheet with three parts to go on the rounded side of your PS3. Thin but sturdy.

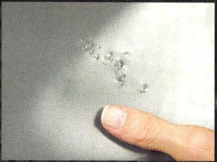
DECALGIRL. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

2 Firm, easy to peel, and sticky but not *too* sticky. We like the ridged texture.

3 Applying without air bubbles just takes a gentle touch. Bonus: you can easily retry.



4 The key test! Scratch, scratch, scratch. Let's see if it breaks the skin...



5 Nope, whew, looks all right. The skin offers a moderate level of protection.

6 And look, it didn't leave a residue! PTOM's verdict: Decal Girl skins are okay to use!

5

MASACHIKA KAWATA

Resident Evil producer on the race row, the power of Western devs, and doing four-player co-op next time

"We didn't need to change it for the sake of changing it." *Resident Evil 5* producer Masachika Kawata is telling us why *RE5* follows *RE4's* original design so slavishly. He continues, "Trends and times have changed since *Resident Evil 4* so we have to tick boxes to makes sure *Resident Evil 5* is good as a modern game. We wanted new elements: co-op was one of the things we had to have. It's a new gaming system, new controls, etc. We ticked the boxes we needed." But co-op, the biggest addition to the series and for our money the best part of *Resident Evil 5,* wasn't even on the cards initially. "When we started we were looking for something new to add and we settled on a co-op mode. It was difficult because we'd never done it before, and there was huge pressure on the team, but we're pleased with the results."

Safety in numbers

The good news is that co-op is likely to play an even bigger part in *Resident Evil's* future. "We could've had a four-player mode, but we had limited development time so we decided two was best. In the future we could have many more players." He isn't giving anything away on what's next for the series, though: "We haven't decided yet whether we're going to work on a *Resident Evil 6* or not." Perhaps someone should tell that to *RE5's* chief producer Jun Takeuchi who recently said the next installment would be a complete reboot for the series.

On the subject of Takeuchi, it sounds like working under him wasn't always a smooth process for Kawata. In a previous interview he described the game's production as a war zone. How so? "Takeuchi-san is a great leader and a great boss but we have many creators within the team," he explains, "and to make a good game we have numerous discussions—not all of them where we agree. I described development as 'like war time' because all of the creators are coming in with their ideas and there's a clash." Could such heated debates be the result of increasing pressure from the Western market? "Looking at sales I agree that Western developers are more prominent compared to Japanese ones. However, the situation is that Japanese publishers focus on games for the Japanese market. So developers haven't really changed, it's just a trend that Japanese games aren't appealing to Western markets. So there's a difference, and as far as the numbers go, Western developers are doing better." Does he worry that Japanese developers will have to cater more to Western tastes? "I am aware that Japanese developers are starting to look into the Western market, and if they can take some of the share back, that would be great."

Storm brewing

As we discuss the east/west divide, the race issue and *RE5's* African setting comes up. Our interview takes place before the game's release, but we can guess the reaction to some of the awkward in-game imagery—specifically a tribal village visited a few hours in. So we ask Kawata-san if he's aware of how sensitive Western culture is to certain racial stereotypes? "I'm not aware of the depiction of the native village making Westerners feel uncomfortable," he answers. "If you play through the game and see what we try to do... I'm just hoping that people 'get' it. This is a piece of entertainment and I hope that everyone is going to thoroughly enjoy it."

Masachika Kawata 411

TITLE: Producer, *Resident Evil 5*
FIRST GAME AT CAPCOM: *Mega Man 8*
FIRST GAME WITH *RESIDENT EVIL* CREATOR SHINJI MIKAMI: *Dino Crisis*, 1999
FIRST *RESIDENT EVIL* GAME: *Resident Evil 3: Nemesis*, 2000

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"5 out of 5 stars. Editor's Choice."
— *PlayStation: The Official Magazine*

**"A guaranteed stunner for the PS3.
5 out of 5 stars."** — *GamePro Magazine*

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6 DESTINATION: PSP FUTURE

In the face of rumors about a new, non-UMD system, SCEA comes out swinging with the best PSP games line-up possibly ever

SONY
DISNEY
HANNAH MONTANA
SONY
Memory Stick PRO Duo
2GB
MagicGate

While 2008 may be considered the year PSP owners were left thirsting for fresh content by the portable's game drought, this year may well be remembered for forcing those same gamers to build arks just to stay afloat in the sea of newfound PSP support. Hot on the heels of a rumored UMD-abandoning PSP2 being in the works (see sidebar, right), Sony unleashed a flood of PSP-supporting announcements.

Riding the success of previous Entertainment packs (likes Kratos' blood-red bundle) come two new enhanced PSP packages. Hoping to prove that tween girls love to game too is the Hannah Montana Entertainment PSP Pack, complete with the undeniably lovely lilac PSP, a Hannah Montana game, episodes of the popular Disney series, a 2GB Memory Stick PRO Duo and, best of all for those customization-crazed kids, *stickers*.

More appealing to the male demographic: the *Assassin's Creed* PSP Entertainment Pack. This one gets a piano-black PSP and an all-new title starring the stealthy blade-baring badass. Some yet-to-be-revealed extras are promised to round out the pack—no confirmation it will include decorative stickers depicting Altair gutting a street goon.

If you already own a PSP and are desperate for a good reason to blow the dust from the UMD slot, help is on the way. Turns out 2009 could really be the year of the PSP:

- *Rock Band: Unplugged* is bringing the band to the PSP stage with an *Amplitude*-like gameplay format.
- *MotorStorm: Arctic Rush* chills on the portable with a new snow-themed title.

- Sackboy will grace PSP in a *LittleBigPlanet* built specifically for the system—rumored PS3 interoperability puts this one high on our must-play list!
- EA Sports' *Madden* and *Tiger Woods* will have PSP-to-PS3 connectivity (whatever that might mean) in the 2010 iterations out later this year.
- Atlus' quirky, original *Persona* series will also get released on PSP in the U.S.
- Konami is rumored to have a *Silent Hill* remake (the original, we're assuming) in the works for PSP.
- And in a very vague nod to the fact that the company would just love some *GTA* action back on PSP, SCEA's John Koller told MTV Multiplayer's Stephen Totilo that there were "continued conversations" with Rockstar, which is just enough carrot dangled to get us hoping.

Rumor Control

PSP2? We've all heard the rumors, we've seen concept designs ranging from the credible to the incredulous, but now we're hearing developers talk. Well, one developer, David Perry, whose recent Twittering stated as a matter of fact that not only is a brand-new PSP, like, for sure in the works, but it could be out by the end of the year, and it wouldn't have a UMD drive, opting instead for purely digital distribution. Sony's response? Crickets.

SCEA's John Koller claimed to have never heard of Perry "until a month ago" but curiously didn't deny anything Perry said.

PTOM Take: We said a month or so ago (in Rob's Ed Note) that a new PSP was needed, and we've thought for months that the next-generation game system would not be hampered by a hard media delivery option. Whatever it's called (PSP2, PSP-4000), we believe it to be real, and you should be hearing official word by this year's E3 (early June).

7 CHUN-LI SAYS NO TO FIREBALLS

We talk *Street Fighter*, buns, and red-hot balls with Kristin Kreuk

It's no good. No matter how hard we push her, Kristin Kreuk refuses to say which fellow celebrity she'd throw a fireball at. "I don't know if I can answer that," she tells us, giggling. "Chun-Li throws fireballs, but I try not to." So the star of the new film *Street Fighter: The Legend Of Chun-Li* is a beautiful Hollywood actress with martial arts skills and the morals of Gandhi? Maybe we're in love.

"I'm not really a gamer," admits Kreuk, not entirely shockingly, as we speak to her in her LA hotel room. She's just back from Japan where she's been promoting her role as the bun-headed Chun-Li. Despite playing the first lady of fisticuffs she's a novice when it comes to the game. "I played it once with a friend after I'd done the movie. I played Chun-Li, and neither of us really knew how to play the game very well, and I won! Mostly I just hit buttons, like a little two-year-old playing piano." She tells us her boyfriend plays games, but only *World Of Warcraft.* That's right; the funny, sexy star goes home to a man who likes pretending to be a blood elf.

Special K

Best known for her role as Lana Lang in the TV series *Smallville,* Kreuk signed on for the action role just five weeks before shooting began. Her five-days-a-week schedule of kick work, stretching, tai chi, and choreography might be enough to cripple most people, but she took it all in her stride. "Because I have a competitive gymnastics background as well as a martial arts background, I like to train my body that much. For me the achiness is a good thing. Mostly I was just hungry all the time!"

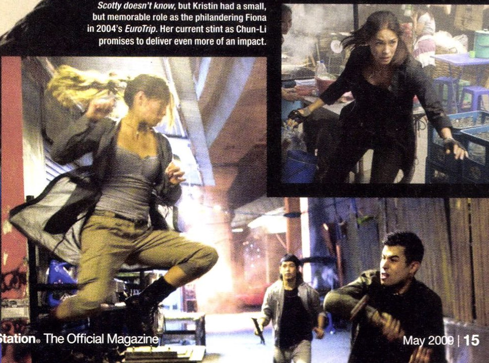
She might have the moves, but don't expect to see much of Chun-Li's trademark blue dress and hair in the film; while Kreuk loved the strength of her character she isn't keen on her dress sense. "There's once sequence in a club where I wore the buns and a blue dress as a kind of homage. But she's essentially homeless on the streets for a lot of the movie and I don't know why she would have that outfit on…unless she was prostituting herself!" she adds, laughing. We opt to remain silent at this point.

And... action

The film follows Chun-Li's quest for justice after the death of her father, but don't expect any Oscar-bothering emoting. "There's some acting in the movie, but mostly it's action. It's not a really challenging role as much as it's a really physical role," explains Kreuk. She wanted to make her character "as human and believable as possible…amidst one-liners and kicking!" The film also stars *American Pie* veteran Chris Klein, *The Green Mile's* Michael Clarke Duncan as Balrog, and Taboo from The Black Eyed Peas as Vega. The film released right at press time, so we don't have much critical feedback to report, but the producers seem confident the film will find its audience—Kreuk's already contracted for a second outing.

Celeb bio

Aside from starring as Superman's love interest in *Smallville,* Kreuk appeared in the teen comedy flick *EuroTrip,* and the indie film *Partition.* Her big break was the lead role in a 2001 adaptation of *Snow White.*



Scotty doesn't know, but Kristin had a small, but memorable role as the philandering Fiona in 2004's *EuroTrip.* Her current stint as Chun-Li promises to deliver even more of an impact.

8 CARD-CARRYING FANBOY

You want it, but how much?

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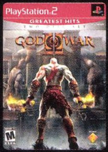
It's ridiculously sexy. It oozes PlayStation fanaticism. We'll whip it out of our pockets and it'll announce on our behalf, "Hi, I'm 'in' with Nathan Drake, Solid Snake, Naruto, and…Sackboy… AND I ask no questions, do you?" We'll smirk, pay for our purchases, and walk off nonchalantly, knowing the world has witnessed how awesome [*cough*, dorky] we are.

That's the number one reason we want the PlayStation credit card. A distant second? The rewards. We had our squirrels crunch some numbers, and wow, it'll take a lot of PS3 game purchases to earn that 46-inch HDTV. But it will be free...sorta. Keep in mind, when you get a PlayStation credit card, you become a Sony Rewards member and can earn points that way as well. But really, in this economy, just get the credit card, laminate it, and carry it around as a badge of your PlayStation devotion—credit crisis be damned!

46-inch BRAVIA S Series LCD TV
Cost: 129,999 Points
How much you'd have to spend at SonyStyle.com to earn it: $25,999.80
Likelihood: In your dreams, buddy

PlayStation Portable 3000
Cost: 19,999 Points
How much you'd have to spend at SonyStyle.com to earn it: $3,999.80
Likelihood: Possible, if you actually *buy* that BRAVIA TV



God of War II
Cost: 4,000 Points
How much you'd have to spend at SonyStyle.com to earn it: $800.00
Likelihood: Easy, consider it a free bonus with a new laptop

OTHER PERKS

Think those rewards are too hard to earn? We do, too. Luckily, special discounts, reverse auctions, daily giveaways, and other gimmicks mean card carriers have a (small) chance to earn other benefits with their card. The deal we saw? An iPod Boombox Dock for $28 dollars off. Not quite PlayStation-worthy, but maybe next week…

EARNING POINTS WITH YOUR PLAYSTATION CARD

Points Earned	Money Spent
5 Points	Per $1 spent at Sony Style stores and SonyStyle.com.
3 Points	Per $1 spent on Sony purchases from authorized Sony retailers. (Go to **http://direct.where2getit.com/sony/** to search for the ones near you. They include stores like Target, Toys R Us, Best Buy, office supply stores, and more.)
1 Point	Per $1 spend on everyday purchases.

EARNING POINTS ON SONYREWARDS.COM

Points Earned	Activity
50 Points	Create a "Wish List" of Sony products you'd like. (Once.)
25 Points	Confirm or update that Wish List once a month. (Monthly.)
10 Points	Complete a Sony Rewards poll/survey.
50 Points	Fill out a questionnaire in Your Profile. (Once.)
100 Points	Register a BD-Live enabled Blu-ray title.

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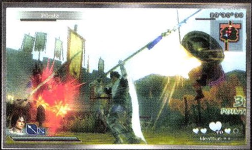
Bi Xie
Multi Attack
Panacea

Multi-player and Single-player action! Up to four friends can join forces for coordinated attacks.



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www.koei.com

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9 HARDWARE

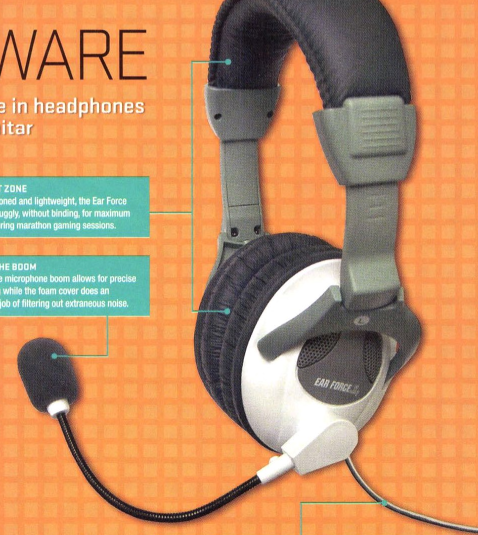
We strap on a force in headphones and a beast of a guitar

Ear Force PX1

MANUFACTUER: Turtle Beach | MSRP: $79.95

The Ear Force PX1 headphone serves as a perfect isolation chamber for gamers seeking to escape the annoying aural distractions of everyday life. In addition to amplifying in-game sound, the unit integrates online chat audio resulting in an acoustic environment unfettered by ambient interference.

We found the headphones to be comfortable, function as advertised, and easy to setup via the component or composite cables. The one barrier to outright recommendation of the PX1 is the $79.95 price tag, a little steep for our liking, but check them out at **www.turtlebeach.com.**



COMFORT ZONE
Well-cushioned and lightweight, the Ear Force PX1 fits snuggly, without binding, for maximum comfort during marathon gaming sessions.

LOWER THE BOOM
The flexible microphone boom allows for precise positioning while the foam cover does an admirable job of filtering out extraneous noise.

TURTLE BEACH

SPEAK EASY
The chat mic connects to the PlayStation via the Audio Advantage Amigo USB sound card, which can also be used to connect the PX1 to PCs and laptops.

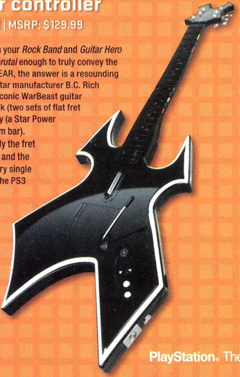
LIVE WIRE
While we'd love it if the PX1 were wireless, the 16-foot headphone cable allows for a wide range to roam. The instructions confusingly neglect to mention what to do if you're using HDMI instead of a component or composite connection, but the solution is to simply designate separate outputs for video and audio in the PS3's Settings menu.

WarBeast guitar controller

MANUFACTUER: dreamGEAR | MSRP: $129.99

Oh sure, those guitars that came with your *Rock Band* and *Guitar Hero* bundles are *functional*, but are they *brutal* enough to truly convey the power of rock? According to dreamGEAR, the answer is a resounding "Hell no!" They've partnered with guitar manufacturer B.C. Rich to bring you a full-size replica of the iconic WarBeast guitar that combines a *Rock Band*-style neck (two sets of flat fret buttons) with a *Guitar Hero*-style body (a Star Power button at the bridge and a clicky strum bar).

The essential components—namely the fret buttons and strum bar—function well and the wireless guitar is compatible with every single guitar-based game available on both the PS3 and PS2. Though we liked the look of the WarBeast, we thought the tone switch was overly stiff and we suffered several unwanted Star Power/Overdrive triggers when we played *Rock Band* while standing up. Opinions regarding the unit's size ranged from satisfying to inconvenient, but if you dig the metal aesthetic, the only real argument against the axe is its hefty price tag.

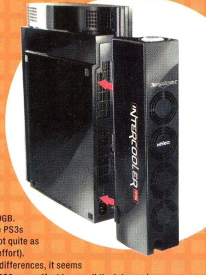


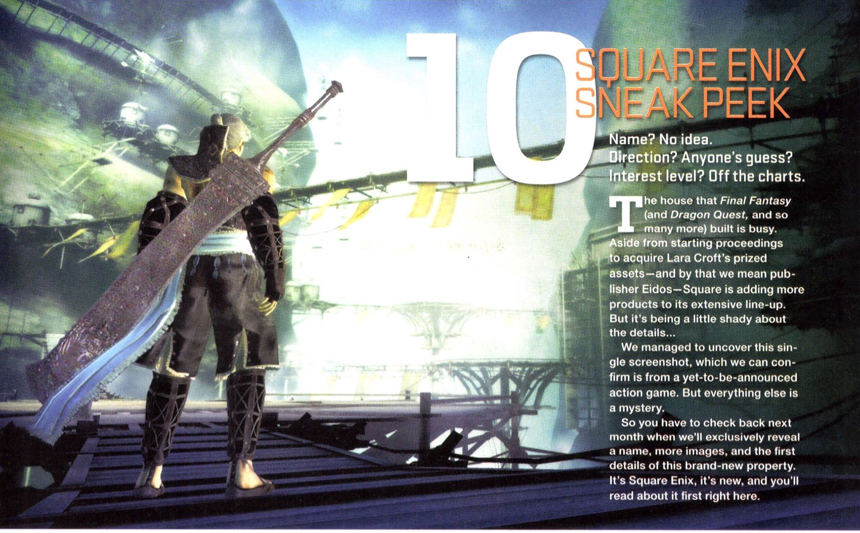
Fit to be tried

In our Feb 09 issue, we took Nyko to task for the design and fit of its Intercooler TS cooling peripheral—try as we might, we just couldn't get the unit to stay securely attached to our PS3. Nyko contacted us soon thereafter with concern that our test unit may have been damaged or faulty. The company offered to send a new unit and we agreed to a retest.

Our initial install attempt on the 60GB PS3 from the previous test netted the same result: the Intercooler wouldn't attach securely and dislodged at the slightest bump. So we tested on three additional 60GB models and one 80GB. The Intercooler fit perfectly on two of the PS3s and acceptably on the other two units (not quite as snug, but more secure than our original effort).

While we couldn't discern any visible differences, it seems that minute production variations in the PS3s can affect how well the Intercooler TS unit fits. Our original 60GB PS3 test mule could very well be a production oddity (likely, since it's Teresa's PS3) and the exception to the fitting rule.





10

SQUARE ENIX SNEAK PEEK

Name? No idea. Direction? Anyone's guess? Interest level? Off the charts.

The house that *Final Fantasy* (and *Dragon Quest,* and so many more) built is busy. Aside from starting proceedings to acquire Lara Croft's prized assets—and by that we mean publisher Eidos—Square is adding more products to its extensive line-up. But it's being a little shady about the details...

We managed to uncover this single screenshot, which we can confirm is from a yet-to-be-announced action game. But everything else is a mystery.

So you have to check back next month when we'll exclusively reveal a name, more images, and the first details of this brand-new property. It's Square Enix, it's new, and you'll read about it first right here.

ETCETERA

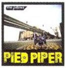
All the *other* stuff that delights the PTOM staff and distracts us from getting our work done on time. But we're willing to sacrifice for *you.*

MLB 09: The Show | Games | $39.99
Little shout-out to the PSP SKU that can easily be overlooked as we salivate over another season of PS3-based baseball competition. Some of the tweaks seen in the bigger version aren't here, naturally, but you can record your own chants to a Memory Stick and personalize your portable baseball gaming that way. Now we just need a long plane ride to work through a Road to the Show 3.0 career.

Manny Ramirez | Athlete | $25 million/year (est.)
Speaking of baseball, by the time you read this Roger will have finally accepted the sad, cold truth that Manny Ramirez isn't going to join his beloved San Francisco Giants. Visions of a Western Division championship will no longer dance in his head, but with the Giant's stellar pitching staff, he steadfastly refuses to give up hope for the 2009 season. But please Manny, anywhere but with the vile Dodgers!

They Might Be Giants | Music | $13.99
And speaking of Giants, Carlos the Intern continues to endear himself to the *ahem* more experienced members of the PTOM staff with his appreciation of musical artifacts like They Might Be Giants. Actually, we never listened to the group even during the '80s, but Carlos assures us that "Istanbul" off the Flood album is da bomb. Cool beans.

Amoeba Music | Record Store | New or Used?
Feeling a bit threatened that his obscure music cred was being challenged by Carlos, Scott felt it necessary to remind us that he listens to music that average chain stores simply don't carry. He thanks the musical gods then for Amoeba Music (stores in San Francisco, Berkeley, and Hollywood), which houses a breathtakingly vast selection of new and used music—even from artists people actually listen to. Check them out at www.amoeba.com.



The Pillows | Music | $60.98
Okay, this is getting ugly. Refusing to relinquish the coveted crown of obscurity, Carlos counters with Japanese band, The Pillows, whose latest album Pied Piper goes for an inexplicable $60.98 on Amazon.com. Carlos insists all their songs are great and he's been a fan since hearing "Ride on Shooting Star" in *FLCL,* which we Wiki-ed to discover is an Anime series. Just stop it now, guys.

Carolyn New York nail polish | Cosmetics | $7.99
While Carlos and Scott vie for the title of Master of the Arcane, Teresa just does her nails. She just ordered 10 bottles of Carolyn New York nail polish (www.carolynnewyork.com) for $1.25 each because they were on sale! Their color choices aren't extensive, but their brushes, bottles, and formula are top-notch. Roger's trying to bum a bottle off Teresa because he wants to feel pretty, too. Get your own, freak.

Exploding Dog | Website | Free
For nearly a decade now, artist Sam Brown has taken titles emailed to him by his fans and turned them into cute, quirky, and insightful illustrations, and for almost the same amount of time, Scott has thoroughly enjoyed Sam's work. If you ever find yourself on the Internet with nothing to do, head over to ExplodingDog.com to get your fill of robots, birds, monsters, people, clouds, and yes, dogs. Although none of them are exploding. Weird.

Panic Goods T-shirts | Clothing | $24.95
What to do if a dog does happen to explode and ruins your shirt? Head on over to www.panic.com/goods/ for a gratifyingly eclectic change of tops. Teresa can't stop laughing at Keita Takehashi's commentary for the *Katamari* shirts he designed for Panic Goods. The T-shirt designs on the site are quirky—maybe too quirky. But while you're there, don't forget to check out the *Noby Noby Boy* shirts as well.

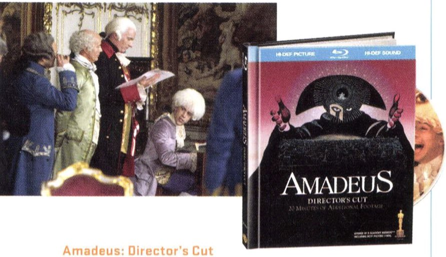
MBT Chapa GTX Pumpkin | Shoes | $270
MBT claims to be the anti-shoe with their odd-looking footwear purportedly capable of toning, shaping, and reducing stress to your body. Roger's intrigued by the shoes and their claimed benefits, but not enough to lay down the cash without an extended test drive. Now, if only a pair of size 10s happened to appear in the mail...size 9.5 if they run large.

Social Networking | Technology | Free
Can't get enough of us? Want to hear what's happening here at PTOM Towers all day? How late Butters arrives at the office, Ken's choice of bagel toppings, Roger's order from Waiter.com, Rob's rant on whatever bugged him in the world of sports on this particular day. Well, you can get it all through our Twittering, so follow @P_TOM. Or on Facebook, search for *PlayStation: The Official Magazine.* And find out just how interesting we all are!

Blu-ray Central

In the spirit of Mom, we take a look at crazy prodigies, creepy serial killing, CG wackiness, and lots of Seth Rogan. Mom loves Seth Rogan, right? Mom? Mom...? Seth...?

PlayStation: The Official Magazine
PICK OF THE MONTH



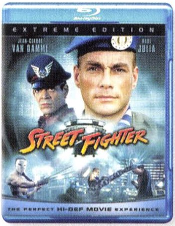
Amadeus: Director's Cut

PRICE: $35.99 RATED: R

| MOVIE | Easily among the greatest biopics in cinematic history, this is an amazingly dark, unflinching look at crazy genius and jealous obsession. While it might not be on your personal must-watch list, it should be even if you aren't into classical music. F. Murray Abraham and Tom Hulce as dueling rivals are particularly amazing, and the gorgeous sets and—especially—the newly redone powerhouse audio insist we bestow the thumbs up if it's an upgrade from DVD, or a no-brainer if it's not yet in your collection.

| EXTRAS | The hardcover-book format, complete with a 36-page booklet detailing the cast, crew, and other aspects of the film is good enough. Add a soundtrack CD, great director and writer commentary, and an hour-long documentary and it warrants multiple viewings. Plus, the movie itself is a new cut with 30 extra minutes.

MOVIE ★★★★★
EXTRAS ★★★★



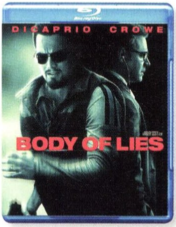
Street Fighter: Extreme Edition

PRICE: $29.99 RATED: PG-13

| MOVIE | Like most videogame to movie transitions, *Street Fighter* is not a good movie. Unlike most, however, it manages to find solace in its so-bad-it's-good quality. The plot, characters, and action are all incredibly laughable, and for gamers the sheer level of ineptitude of the entire production is sure to entertain.

| EXTRAS | In addition to several promotion trailers about the latest *Street Fighter* game, the extras include deleted scenes, outtakes, storyboarding details, and other game-to-movie related fluff. Director Steven de Souza's commentary is surprisingly good, although he seems to have no idea just how bad his movie truly is.

MOVIE ★★
EXTRAS ★★★



Body of Lies

PRICE: $35.99 RATED: R

| MOVIE | Part convoluted spy thriller and part fascinating look at a nearly alien culture, *Body of Lies* is slow to start and hard to follow. Yet when it focuses on the atmosphere and culture, it's remarkably interesting. Unfortunately, that's not enough to make the movie live up to its star-studded potential, though some will no doubt overlook its failings and enjoy the stylized story.

| EXTRAS | There's a lot of supplemental data to take in here, especially the focus points segment where key scenes are explained in depth. The commentary tracks are haphazard though—sometimes providing interesting details on the making of the film and translation from novel to film, but often just trudging on aimlessly.

MOVIE ★★½
EXTRAS ★★★

The Midnight Meat Train

PRICE: $39.99 RATED: R

| MOVIE | Good horror movies are hard to find, but the latest adaptation of a Clive Barker story is surprisingly excellent. Although its logic lapses occasionally into the bizarre, it's possessed by some really cheesy CG effects, and the third act almost (but not quite) collapses under the weight of its own plot, there's much to like about this grim and grisly tale. Vinnie Jones (*Snatch,* and former English soccer player) is always enjoyable to watch, but the real star is the brilliant cinematography. With stunning use of colors and camerawork, *The Midnight Meat Train* is one of best-looking horror films around.

Blu-ray Disc
"EASILY THE BEST CLIVE BARKER ADAPTATION SINCE THE FIRST HELLRAISER FILM..."
THE MIDNIGHT MEAT TRAIN
"SHARP AND BRUTAL..."
1080P / BEYOND HIGH DEFINITION

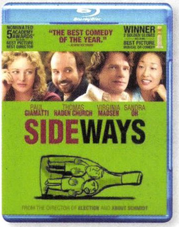
| EXTRAS | Aside from some reasonably interesting documentaries on the film (and one on Clive Barker), the disc comes equipped with surprisingly good commentary between the director and Barker that sheds light on nearly every aspect of the story.

MOVIE ★★★★
EXTRAS ★★★½

Jason D'Aprile wants to star in a Seth Rogan movie...and he could do it. Comments, questions, rants, raves, recommendations? E-mail him at **PTOM_Bluray@futureus.com.**

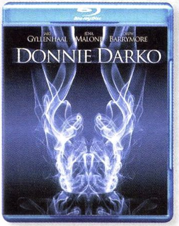
SHORT TAKES Also Released This Month

This month we turn a nod to a plethora of great first-time releases on Blu-ray, care of Fox.


SIDEWAYS
"THE BEST COMEDY OF THE YEAR."
PAUL GIAMATTI THOMAS HADEN CHURCH VIRGINIA MADSEN SANDRA OH

Sideways

+ Next to *The 40-Year-Old Virgin*, there are few movies that spotlight guy relationships so perfectly. Funny, harsh, and biting. Serve with a Pinot.


JAKE GYLLENHAAL JENA MALONE DREW BARRYMORE
DONNIE DARKO

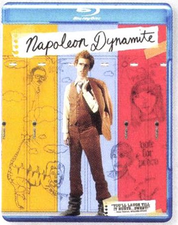
Donnie Darko

+ Need 20 extra minutes of this bizarre classic? We got ya covered. Still strange and plodding, yet somehow disturbingly charming.

From Creator Mike Judge
Office Space
SPECIAL EDITION with Flair!

Office Space

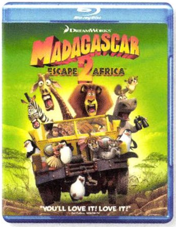
+ Admit it. Your Blu-ray collection needs more flair.


Napoleon Dynamite

Napoleon Dynamite

+ Like a love song to nerds... A painful one that hits a little too close to our homes.

CG of the Month


DreamWorks
MADAGASCAR 2 ESCAPE 2 AFRICA
"YOU'LL LOVE IT! LOVE IT!"

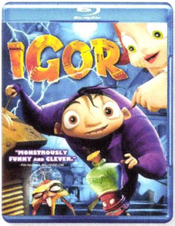
Madagascar 2: Escape to Africa

PRICE: $39.99 RATED: PG

MOVIE The joy of the *Madagascar* movies isn't in the main characters so much as everything that happens around them. While the main four go about their zany misadventures, the lemurs, monkeys, and penguins pop up regularly to steal their scenes. It's certain to be a grand hit with the kiddies, but as usual, the sly humor will make the movie worth watching for the over-age crowd too.

EXTRAS The audio and picture-in-picture commentary tracks are lively and enjoyable for the most part, though the series of making-of shorts are mostly superfluous, and the games are a complete wash. The highlight of the extras is the penguin shorts, and the kids are sure to love the music videos.

MOVIE ★★★★
EXTRAS ★★★½


IGOR
"MONSTROUSLY FUNNY AND CLEVER."

Igor

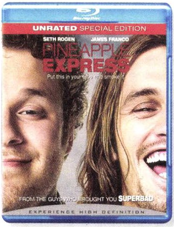
PRICE: $39.99 RATED: PG

MOVIE It's not surprising that *Igor* bombed in theaters. It's hard to imagine young children not being disturbed by the content—including an invulnerable, suicidal cat-thing expertly voice by Steve Buscemi, an Igor meat processing center, and an end musical number where blind orphans sing "I can see clearly now." But the right-minded adult might enjoy some of the wonderfully twisted stuff here. The movie isn't as bizarrely dark as *The Nightmare Before Christmas*, but it's still enjoyably strange.

EXTRAS The frothy and fun commentary is the highlight of the otherwise meager extras. Also included are concept art galleries and an alternate opening.

MOVIE ★★★½
EXTRAS ★★½

The Seth Rogan Corner


UNRATED SPECIAL EDITION
SETH ROGEN JAMES FRANCO
PINEAPPLE EXPRESS
FROM THE GUYS WHO BROUGHT YOU SUPERBAD

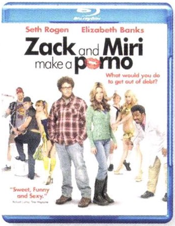
Pineapple Express

PRICE: $39.98 RATED: R/UNRATED

MOVIE If your take on the stoner movie is solid, you can't go wrong. Fortunately, this ode to the bong delivers all the way. Aside from Seth Rogan being, well, himself, James Franco's performance as a complete pothead is very nearly a revelation for the young actor. Deftly taking on the clichés of buddy action movies, the constant focus on the lead characters' bro-mance makes all the craziness positively endearing.

EXTRAS Tons of extras supplement the good times, but while the commentary track is engaging and humorous—and loaded with commentators—it's too overcrowded to lend much meat to the film.

MOVIE ★★★★
EXTRAS ★★★★


Seth Rogen Elizabeth Banks
Zack and Miri make a porno
What would you do to get out of debt?
"Sweet, Funny and Sexy."

Zack and Miri Make a Porno

PRICE: $34.99 RATED: R

MOVIE Hilarious, crude, occasionally disgusting, but with its heart in the right place, Kevin Smith's latest is actually a gooey sweet love story hidden inside a crunchy porn coating. The humor resided in the gutter before much of it was yanked into this script, yet the situation comedy manages to stay just barely in the realm of the possible, and the results are simply charming. Though certainly not for everyone, fans of Smith and Seth Rogan will find a lot of big love here.

EXTRAS There are plenty of hilarious behind-the-scenes extras and featurettes, but it's perplexing that there's no commentary track from Smith and company—something that fans of his movies expect and usually receive.

MOVIE ★★★★
EXTRAS ★★★

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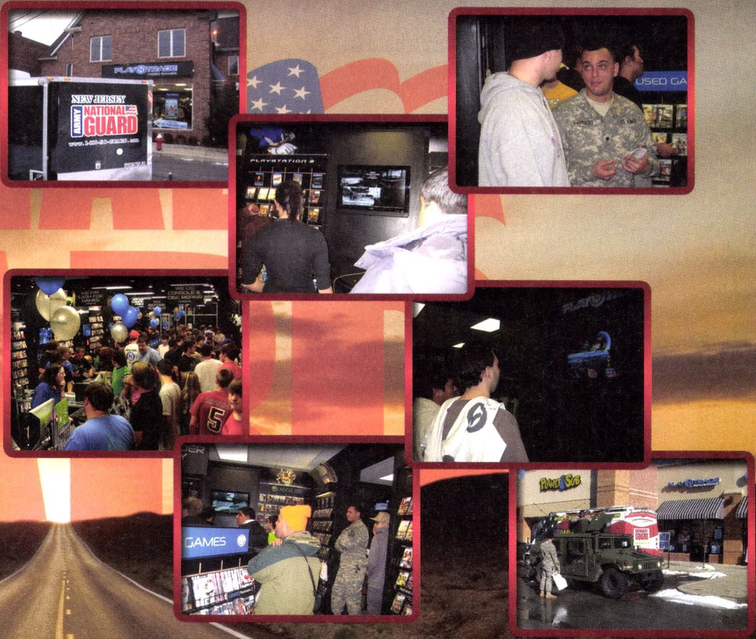
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PLAY N TRADE

CONGRATULATIONS TO ALL OUR COMPETITORS!

MATURE 17+
M
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Blood and Gore
Intense Violence
Strong Language

Blowing up a fuel depot to earn chaos also causes a pop-up caption to inform me it's one of 400 dotted around the island. Lead designer Johansson reckons you can spend hours just destroying stuff and still feel like you're making progress: "It's even possible to not do many missions at all if you just keep free-roaming, causing chaos."

JUST CAUSE 2

Hands-On Preview

Destruction, devastation, and total chaos: a sleepy-eyed tropical paradise becomes a pot-holed hell

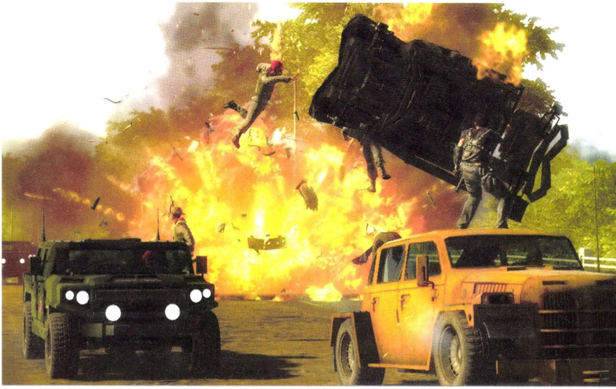
PS3 AVAILABLE: Late 2009 GENRE: Action/Adventure PUBLISHER: Eidos/Warner Bros. Int. Ent. DEVELOPER: Avalanche Studios

At 620-square-miles, the South Pacific island of Panau—the setting of *Just Cause 2*—is a quarter the size of Rhode Island, or the size of 252,480 soccer fields, whatever your choice of reference. As game worlds go, that's big (consider: *Far Cry 2* covered just 30-square-miles of African jungle), so you can be sure you'll have plenty to see.

Protagonist Rico Rodriguez sizes up the island from atop a cliff. From here I can see miles of desert, land stretching out from the sea, and twinkling lights from a distant settlement as the day/night cycle kicks in. It's beautiful and daunting at the same time.

"Everywhere you see, you can go. Every vehicle you see, you can get into," enthuses brand manager Steve Kelsey, "we really want players to feel like they're in this huge playground

Rico truly is a one-man wrecking crew, and the fact that the more chaos he causes the more fun you have...well, that's an inspired game-design decision.



Bombs away! Creative use of C4 explosives can make quick work of a vehicle you may just have been hitching a ride upon. Just make sure you've chosen an alternative method of transportation when you decide to detonate!

where they can do pretty much anything they want," chips in Peter Johansson, lead game designer. To prove the theory I immediately base jump off the cliff, open the parachute at the last moment, and make a perfect landing.

Combined with the grapple, the parachute is a new transportation method that opens up this world. "The grapple is now attached to Rico's arm, so you can use it whenever you want simply by pressing the Left trigger. In the original game, the grapple could only be attached to a vehicle, but now it can be attached to anything in the world: buildings, vehicles, trees, people—you name it," says Kelsey.

To test this, Rico starts blasting away in a small settlement, which provokes an immediate response. Soon he's forced to grapple between buildings and swoop around in his parachute to avoid fierce bouts of enemy fire. Naturally, the grapple also doubles as a weapon, with Rico using it to pull a guard from a water tower who smashes his back on the way down and flips over twice. Havok physics at its grisliest best. Not content with that, Kelsey is quick to list what else the grapple does: "You can yank enemies from ledges, pull them over, haul them out of cars, and even tether items together: people to people, people to vehicles, cars to bridges, people to helicopters, helicopters to helicopters..."

Feeling Factions

A revamped aiming system now gives you full control over the crosshair. You can line up critical shots to the knee or arm and watch enemies stagger around holding their injured limbs, or just blow their brains out with a headshot. All this wanton destruction increases an actual "Chaos" meter, and if you keep filling it you unlock more story missions.

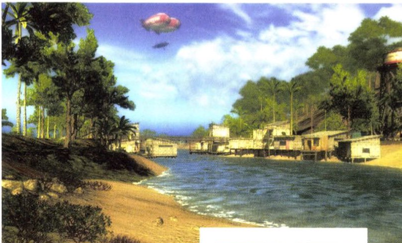
Three factions inhabiting the island—the Roaches, the Reapers, and the Ular Boys—also impact the chaos system. "You can help a faction to storm a military stronghold and establish a headquarters there. Once you do that, their influence grows from this stronghold, and if you cause enough chaos that influence gets progressively larger and larger. New missions then unlock within that area," says Johansson.

One such mission is the rescue of one of Rico's Agency colleagues, Jade Tan. First, let's recap why Rico is on the island in the first place: His former CO, Tom Sheldon, has gone rogue while doing Agency business in Panau and is apparently working for all three factions. A dictator called Baby Panay—because he's just four feet tall—rules Panau. Tan has been kidnapped for finding out too much about what Baby Panay is up to, and Rico must work with Sheldon to get her back from a mountain base.

Hijack a jeep, drive to the military base, use the parachute and grapple to surf on top of a jet, eject the pilot, and then drop in on the mountain base. "You have no vertical limits," says Kelsey, "what you can do is only limited by your imagination." After downing a radio mast (destroying other buildings on the ground), the enemies call in an attack chopper. Time to find the mounted mini-gun, which can conveniently be ripped from its mounting to be used from a better protected location, and bring down the bird.

The best is saved for last. As enemies escape hundreds of feet below, Rico base jumps off the mountain and latches onto one of the moving vehicles. Plant C4 on the roof of the first, and then leap to the second before pressing the detonator. Take out the passenger before sliding to the front of the car and shooting the driver through the windshield.

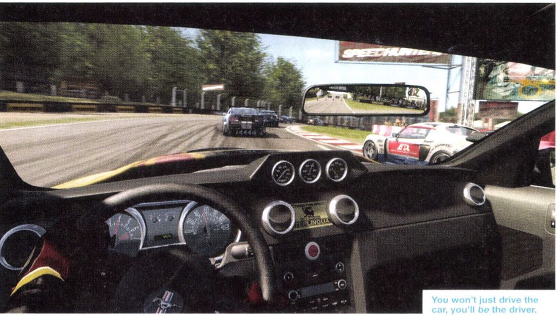
The entire sequence played out like the slickest Hollywood action movie. I'm also sure there are at least a dozen other ways to reach the mountain base and destroy the cars at the end. If the rest of the story missions are this spectacular and unapologetically unrealistic, then *Just Cause 2* will live comfortably alongside more recognized free-roaming, open-world games such as *inFamous* and *Prototype*, and just maybe grab all the headlines. Jonathan Todd



The sprawling landscape houses 261 settlements, which range from the small one here to huge cities.

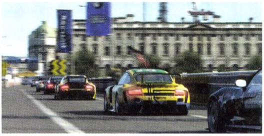
Causing chaos at the controls of the chopper. If you take damage, just parachute out.

More dangerous than surfing shark-infested waters...but so much cooler, too!

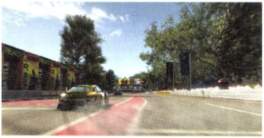


You won't just drive the car, you'll *be* the driver.

Not pictured: extremely helpful on-road guiding line.



Some liberties were taken, but yes, this is London.



So real, you can practically smell the burning rubber.

During the game demo. Scott managed to crash his car so spectacularly that he crashed the game as well. Talk about a bad driver!

Need for Speed SHIFT

Hands-On Preview

Changing Gears

PS3 AVAILABLE: Fall GENRE: Driving PUBLISHER: EA DEVELOPER: Slightly Mad Studios

PS3 | P

For 15 years and 16 games, the *Need for Speed* franchise has consistently reinvented itself. So it's no big surprise that rather than travel the route of the recent (and disappointingly mediocre) *Undercover,* the upcoming *Need for Speed SHIFT* ditches the police chases and open-world drag racing in favor of a more traditional racing simulation format. That means licensed vehicles, real-world racetracks, and no live-action cutscenes starring some flavor-of-the-month actor (as far as we know, anyway). *SHIFT's* approach to this new format, however, is somewhat unexpected.

Developer Slightly Mad—who you may remember from venerable sim-style PC racers like *GT Legends* and *GTR 2*—plans to recreate the "driver experience," giving you a taste of what it's really like to grab the wheel of some of the world's fastest vehicles. While this may sound like the goal of every racing sim, Slightly Mad hopes to achieve a new level of immersion by including a few subtle but genuinely creative details.

The best example is the game's cockpit view, which is intensely realistic and extensively detailed. You see the top of the bonnet (which proves the devs are Brits, as that's "hood" to you and me), your hands on the steering wheel, and both rearview mirrors, all providing you with real-time feedback. Plus, the camera snaps forward and back when you brake or accelerate rapidly and shakes violently when you crash. And cooler still, particularly intense collisions actually cause your driver's vision to blur or even blackout entirely.

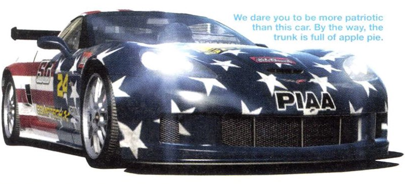
These details may not sound like much, but in practice, they somehow create a noticeably unique experience. In fact, I felt completely comfortable with the first-person camera despite the fact that I typically drive with a chase-cam (which, never fear, is still optional). The impact is subtle—almost imperceptibly so—yet effective.

Beyond this new emphasis on the driver, *SHIFT's* racing already feels fast, fluid, and slightly more forgiving than other simulation games—like the intricately demanding *Gran Turismo.* Despite the fact that *Undercover* released mere months ago, *SHIFT* has already been in development for two full years and features brand-new tech and physics developed specifically for this game, and the effort really shows: the control feels nice and tight, and the crashes exude realism. Oh, and the graphics are already gorgeous.

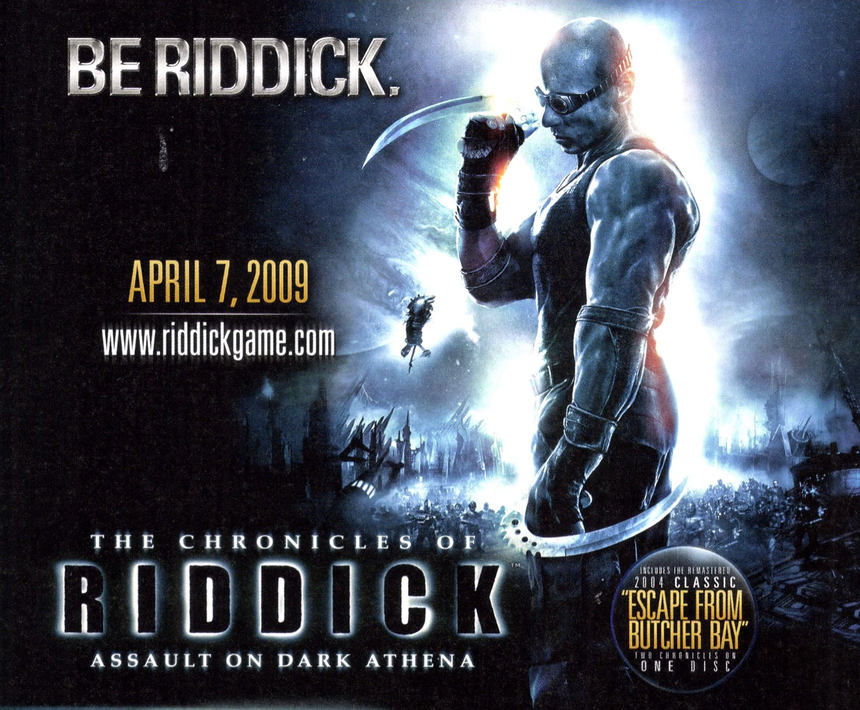
Despite the fact that I got to whip around the Brands Hatch race circuit a few times in a race-ready Audi RS4, much about the game is still unknown. Dynamic replays, car customization, weather effects, and performance-hindering vehicle damage are in for sure, but the exact cars, tracks, and career options will be revealed over the next couple months.

Scott Butterworth

The AI makes mistakes and reacts to your driving as a real person might.



We dare you to be more patriotic than this car. By the way, the trunk is full of apple pie.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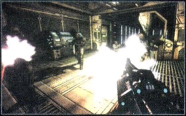
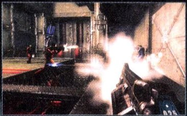


A DARK, INTENSE SHOOTER SET IN AN EPIC SCI-FI WORLD

RIDDICK BRINGS THE DARKNESS WITH STEALTH ACTION AND BRUTAL MELEE COMBAT



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Sexual Content
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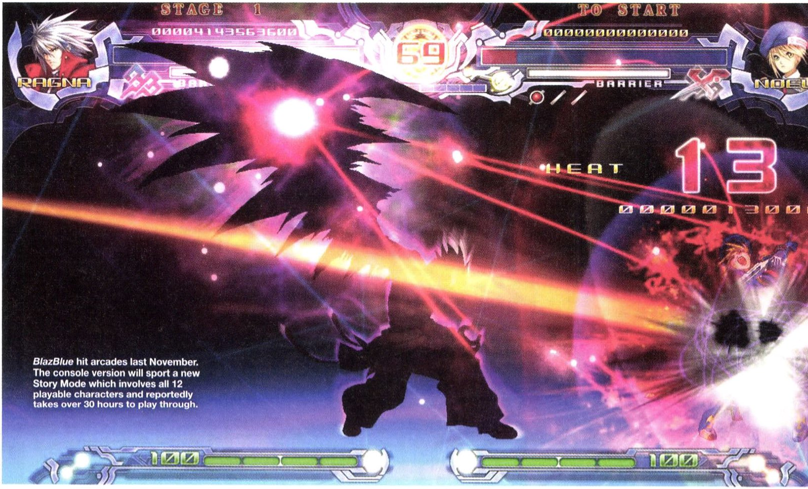


BlazBlue hit arcades last November. The console version will sport a new Story Mode which involves all 12 playable characters and reportedly takes over 30 hours to play through.

BlazBlue:

Hands-On Preview

PS3 | P

Calamity Trigger

The New Face of the Old School

PS3 AVAILABLE: Summer GENRE: Fighting PUBLISHER: Aksys Games DEVELOPER: ARC System Works

"The Wheel of Fate is Turning. Rebel 1. Action!" With these perplexing words, the screen blazed with color, and what followed was as glorious as it was incomprehensible. Amid a sea of glaring chaos, Carl—an adorable witch whose main weapon consists of a giant, lifeless marionette that limply follows her around the stage—launched forward at the amorphous Arakune, a masked monster that makes *Soulcalibur's* Voldo look well-adjusted. After deflecting her attacks with an iridescent shield, he began to place a curse on her as the background suddenly faded to black. The battle raged on, with splashes of color exploding in spectacular 1080p, and while I couldn't tell exactly what was happening, I knew it was awesome.

And that was my first experience with *BlazBlue: Calamity Trigger,* a 2D fighting game that's considered the spiritual successor to the cult-favorite *Guilty Gear* series. As best I can describe, it's a somewhat surreal and distinctly Japanese mix of anime-inspired art and classic arcade flare that features 12 unique, inventive characters (including playable versions of the bosses from the recently released arcade edition) and an epic underlying plot. And as I continued playing, I discovered that it's not impenetrable, just a bit overwhelming

without a proper introduction. So, for those of you who aren't lucky enough to frequent Japanese arcades, allow me to introduce you to *BlazBlue*.

Simple as A, B, C...D

In contrast to the complex on-screen action, the controls consist of your basic eight-direction joystick and just four action buttons: weak, middle, and strong attacks (which are often referred to as simply A, B, and C) and a "Drive" button that controls each character's unique abilities and special techniques. According to the developers, this simple design should allow new players to perform flashy combos right away.

The minimal button layout also channels many of *BlazBlue*'s numerous gameplay mechanics into simple button combinations—like simultaneously pressing B and C to perform grabs and throws or hitting A, B, and C to cancel any move instantly. And although these combinations are relatively simple, there's plenty you can do with them. For instance, you can perform counter grabs and super attacks by pressing the same button combination that your opponent is using to attack you. Your timing must be perfect, but an exclamation mark will flash over your head for a split-second at the exact moment you need to react.

Despite a lengthy play session, it was clear that many more mechanics were yet to be uncovered. So it's difficult for me to gauge the true depth and balance of the fighting, or to predict whether or not the game will have broad appeal or be more of an acquired taste. But I absolutely enjoyed what I played and *BlazBlue: Calamity Trigger* is undeniably unique, so I have great hope that it will live up to the potential it's demonstrated thus far. Scott Butterworth

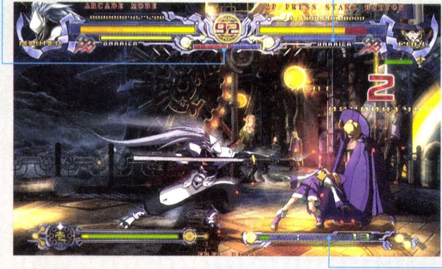
Power Bar

BlazBlue features a number of highly specialized and completely unique gameplay mechanics:

The Guard Libra is a sort of tug-of-war meter that shifts between the two players: the more you block, the more the meter shifts towards you. If it fills completely on your side, you will be momentarily stunned and defenseless. Clearly, *BlazBlue* encourages aggressive play.

Prevent the Guard Libra from shifting (and avoid taking any damage) by using the Barrier Guard technique—a sort of instant shield that appears when you press A and B while blocking.

The Barrier Bar drains as you block, but it regenerates over time...unless you use a Barrier Burst—a last ditch defensive maneuver that cancels your opponent's current combo while pushing them away from you—which disables the Barrier Gauge for the remainder of the round. Don't worry, it sounds more complex than it actually is.



The Tension Bar is a four-part meter that fuels techniques performed with the Drive button. Now, I say "techniques" and not "attacks" because these moves don't necessarily damage your opponent. One character, for instance, has the ability to control the wind and thus push the other player around the screen. Other abilities range from ice attacks to the ability to steal health, but each requires power from the Tension Bar and is performed by using the Drive button and some directional input on the joystick.

Astral Finishers

As the name implies, these are incredibly dramatic, over-the-top finishing moves that can only be executed under a very specific set of conditions: each fighter has to have won a round, you must have a full Tension Bar, and the victim must be at or below 20-percent health. If you manage to pull it off, you'll enjoy an instant victory and might even be treated to a mini-cutscene in which your character delivers the killing blow.

BlazBlue clearly draws upon influences ranging from anime to Japanese traditions to old horror films.

Guilty As Charged

Don't be alarmed if you're unfamiliar with *BlazBlue's* predecessor, *Guilty Gear.* Though it's critically acclaimed and still played by hardcore tournament players, the series never gained true mainstream visibility. Lucky for you, you'll soon have a chance to become acquainted with the quirky fighter as a new, slightly retuned version—wordily titled *Guilty Gear XX Accent Core Plus*—is headed to PS2 and PSP this April.

STORY MODE
STORY MODE
71
TESTAMENT
JUSTICE
BURST
BURST
BEAT 4
COUNTER HIT
TENSION
TENSION

ARCADE MODE
2P PRESS START BUTTON
97
5

The game runs at a true 60 frames-per-second in resolutions up to 1080p, so you can imagine how gorgeous all of the hand-drawn animations and backgrounds look.

Overlord 2

Overlord, schmoverlord. Arise you powerful *minions*

PS3 **GENRE:** Evil simulator **AVAILABLE:** June **PUBLISHER:** Codemasters **DEVELOPER:** Triumph Studios

Thank evilness, the minions are all right.

At the end of *Overlord: Raising Hell,* the old Overlord was trapped inside the Abyss, leaving his world in chaos. Since then his evil fortress has crumbled, a new power (the despicable Empire) has taken hold, outlawing magic throughout the land. Magical creatures either dive into hiding or are eliminated, and the Overlord's loyal minions flee to safe spots across the land, disheveled and leaderless.

Poor, poor, little minion babies.

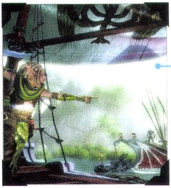
Amid these dire circumstances an orphan boy in Nordberg suddenly exhibits magical talents…and is cast out by the village to die. But a group of brown minions approach the boy and declare him the new Overlord. Thus begins *Overlord 2,* led by a new Overlord that's once again using sword, magic, or most often, rascally minions to command civilization to his evil will.

In the core gameplay the sequel looks similar to the original: sweep minions of four different classes (armored warrior, sneaky rogue, magic caster, and healer) across the land to wreak havoc upon unsuspecting innocents, with some occasional hack, slash, and magic flingin' on the Overlord's part.

But it's the little touches that will earn this game its endearing legacy. And from my session witnessing the game's action and chatting with the game's developers, I've discovered that *Overlord 2* is all about the small enhancements—a bit more humor, a tweak to the camera, and most importantly, several additions to the minion pool. I was so inspired that I created a scrapbook about it. Teresa Dun

PS3 | P

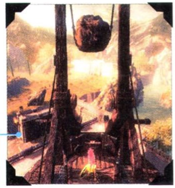
An Overlord Scrapbook Page



New Mechanics

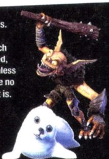
Sea Combat You can whip your minions to make them go faster. They might complain, but they adore you and crave your affection, so they'll obey.

Siege Weapons Hurl those rocks at hordes of oncoming soldiers, destructible pillars, sheep, and if you want, those doors in the distance that lead to your next destination.



Teaching an old minion new tricks

What can minions in *Overlord 2* do? Besides be agreeably evil and naughty, of course.



1. Slaughter wide-eyed baby seals.

2. Become friends. Names for each sidekick will be randomly generated, but your minions will be *named.* Unless you've played the original, you have no idea how deliciously *awesome* that is.

3. Ride mounts! Browns will get wolves. Reds will get fire salamanders. Greens will get spiders. I'm not sure what Blues will get…but I'm crossing my fingers for one-eyed, walking dolphins with *fangs.* Mounts grant extra abilities (wolves can jump across gaps and spiders can clamber over walls, for example) and they'll be involved in environmental puzzles and instrumental in defeating new enemy types.

4. Be resurrected! If one of your minions dies during a mission, you can go to a graveyard and sacrifice some of your newer minions to resurrect an old favorite. *Yes!*

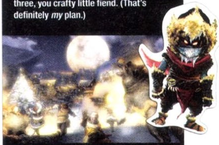
5. Wear disguises. The path of least resistance is to blend in with the crowd.

6. Go on missions alone. New minion-only missions let you take control of a little band of your enslaved critters. For example, sneak through one level by controlling a group of Greens (who can stealth). In another, your browns will dress up as Centurions, casually stroll up to a catapult, grunt at the human guard to tell them they're off duty, and then throw boulders at the people they're dressed as. Delicious!

An Overlord's list of chores

☒ **KICK UP FEET AND LISTEN TO MINSTREL BAND**
As you explore the world, you'll encounter members of a minion minstrel band. Collect them all for your own little concert.

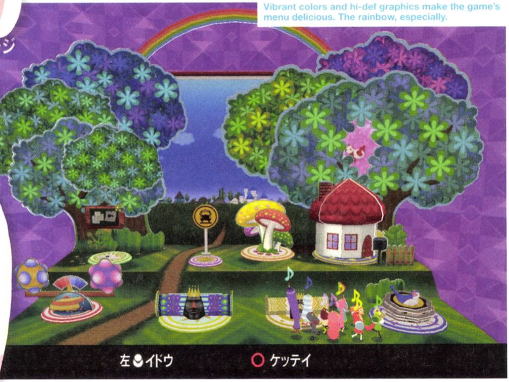
☒ **SPEND SOME "QUALITY TIME" WITH THE MISSUS**
You'll be able to woo and marry one, two, or three special women you meet along your path to ultimate power. You heard right: no either/or here. You can marry all three, you crafty little fiend. (That's definitely *my* plan.)



☒ **ENGAGE IN AN INTROSPECTIVE DEBATE: DESTROY OR DOMINATE?**
In *Overlord 2,* you can pick from two flavors of evil. You can raze a village to the ground or you can enslave all its inhabitants. You can kill an enemy femme fatale you meet in the woods…or you can take her home to be a mistress in your fortress.

☒ **DECORATE**
It's *important* to have a comfortable living space. With spikes. And lots of steel and iron. And fire decals. Okay, strike the fire decals…

☒ **LAUGH AT MINIONS**
There ain't nothin' better than taking the boys out for a night on the town…and observing their crazy antics.



Vibrant colors and hi-def graphics make the game's menu delicious. The rainbow, especially.

Katamari Forever

Rollin' through a hi-def world

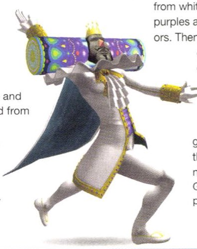
PS3 AVAILABLE: Late 2009 GENRE: Uhhh...Art game? Action? Platformer? PUBLISHER: Namco Bandai DEVELOPER: Namco Bandai

PS3 | P

What the Damacy is *Katamari*?!

A warning to newcomers: *Katamari's* gameplay sounds (well, *is*) absolutely *ridiculous*. You control a tiny, hammer-headed Prince who pushes around a giant ball. Like a magnet, the ball attracts small, light objects (like rocks), which make the ball grow bigger, allowing bigger objects to attach (like cows), which make the ball *even bigger*, and... you get the idea. When time runs out, hopefully you've amassed enough size to please your dad, the King. It sounds wacky, but the bold art style and excellent level design make it feel like you're exploring a wonderous world.

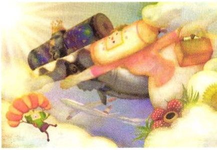
With screenshots this beautiful, I should just get out the way and let you drool. But first, a juicy nugget of info about the new PS3 *Katamari* game: it runs at 1080p. This version is more like a *Katamari* tribute to the critically adored earlier games than a completely new entity, as it borrows liberally from those past experiences in both level design and gameplay (including multiplayer, mission types, and hidden collectibles). It introduces a new move—jump—executed by swooping the controller upwards. And it features classic *Katamari* tracks, remixed by new artists.



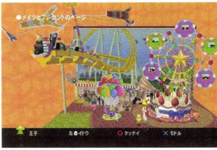
The 25 levels in *Katamari Forever* are a blend of brand new stages and old ones recreated from the past *Katamari* games, but with a twist—in addition to the "classic" graphics each level will be highly stylized in one of several new themes, including canvas (soft hues that make the world look like a painting), comic (bold, dark outlines), colored pencil (reminds me of *Okami*—so gorgeous!), and wood block (objects gain a grainy, wooden texture). When you start some levels, they're in black-and-white (the story explains why), but every time you roll into an item, it bursts into color along with all identical item types on the stage.

I saw the updated Hansel and Gretel stage (originally from *We Love Katamari*). First, the flowers leading to the Witch's candy house transformed from white into pinks and purples and other vibrant colors. Then, the donut walls, the cookie ceilings, and eventually the witch herself all followed suit. Invigorating! *Katamari Forever* won't be much of a gameplay upgrade, but the visuals... So stunning. I've said enough. Go look at the pretty pictures now.

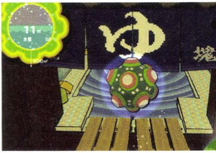
Teresa Dun



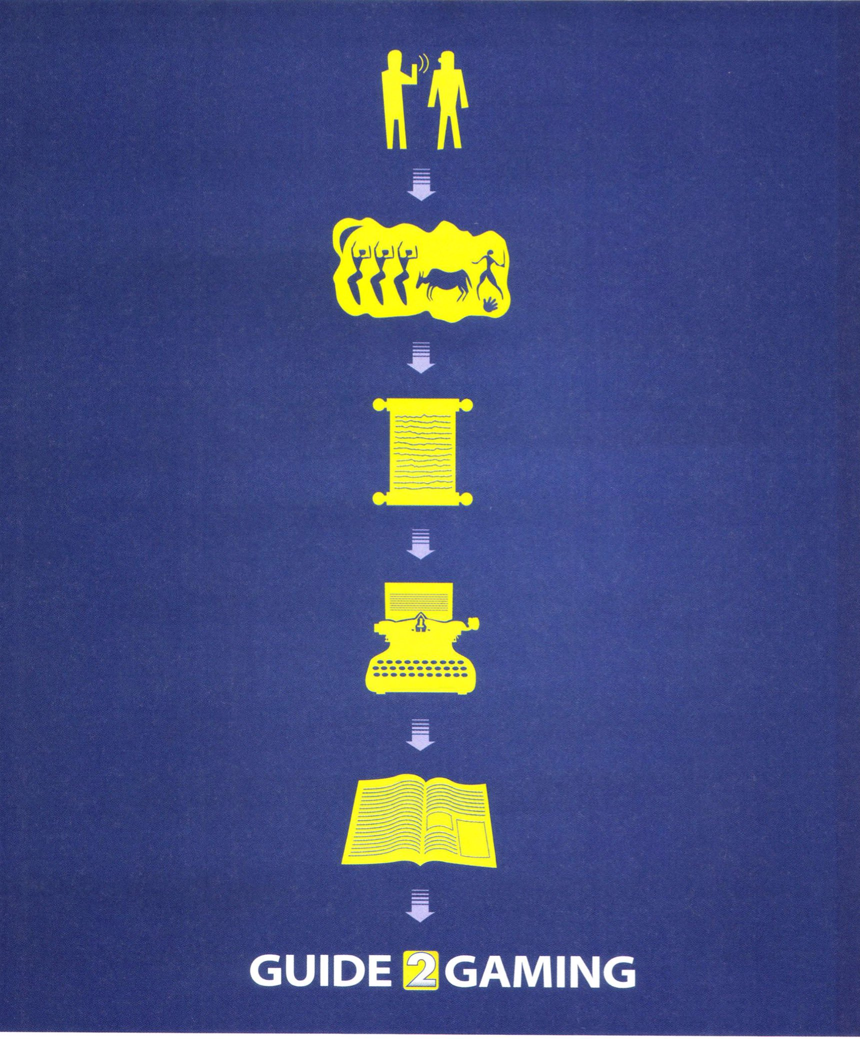
A quirky family: the King, the Queen, and the Prince, soaring through the air. Don't bother asking *why*. It's irrelevent.



Not merely a visual delight, the pop-up menu grants access to costumes, music, and cousins as well!



Poor Prince. He does all the tugging and shoving, but you can barely see him! (Hint: search for the black speck.)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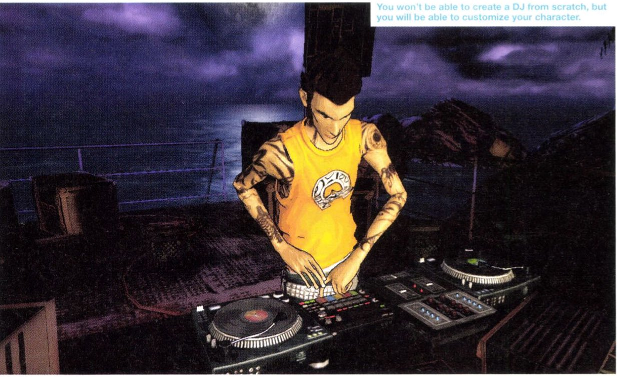
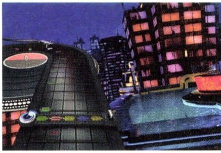
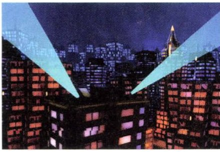


You won't be able to create a DJ from scratch, but you will be able to customize your character.



These familiar rows of scrolling notes form the basis of the gameplay, but you're free to add and subtract notes.



Behold Scratch City! This cel-shaded hip hop mecca is yours to conquer.

Scratch: The Ultimate DJ

First Look Preview

Rhythm genre soon to become a hip-hopcracy

PS3 AVAILABLE: Summer GENRE: Rhythm/Music PUBLISHER: Genius Products DEVELOPER: 7 Studios

PS3 | P

Rap Sheet

The 60-song set list will include everything from mainstream hip hop to underground R&B, from the early '80s to the present day. Here's what's been announced so far (all master tracks):

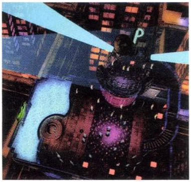
- Flashing Lights - Kanye West
- Intergalactic - Beastie Boys
- Let's Get it Started - The Black Eyed Peas
- Slacker - Tech N9ne
- Don't Sweat the Technique - Eric B. and Rakim
- Feel Good Inc. - The Gorillaz

Additional music from:

- Run DMC
- Nelly
- Deltron 3030
- Mix Master Mike

It was only a matter of time, wasn't it? With the outrageous success of the *Guitar Hero* and *Rock Band* brands and the unchecked growth of the rhythm game genre as a whole, a hip-hop–oriented music game was practically inevitable. But to be fair, the idea for *Scratch: The Ultimate DJ* took seed way back in 2006 when Creative Lead Dan Lehrich first successfully pitched the game concept, and its gameplay, while familiar, does plenty to distinguish itself from those two music juggernauts.

Naturally, the most obvious of these distinguishing characteristics is the game's turntable-inspired peripheral. Dubbed the "Scratch Deck" and built by DJ equipment manufacturer Numark, the rectangular console sports an authentic free-spinning turntable wheel, a cross-fader (a switch that modifies your scratching, comparable to the whammy bar on guitar controllers), and five music-sampler–style sequencer buttons.



The dance floor serves as real-time reflection of your performance. Keep the beats fresh and people will keep on dancing.

Those five buttons serve as the basic tools for the conventional note-matching mechanic that comprises the foundation of the gameplay: notes that match the music scroll down screen at you, you press the corresponding button in time with the song—you know the drill. But unlike *Rock Band* and *Guitar Hero,* the game encourages you to hit extra buttons.

Sticking to the scrolling pattern will produce an unaltered version of the original song, but adding extra notes introduces new sounds and rhythmic variations that essentially let you create a unique real-time remix. Each of the five buttons produces a particular sound (which, depending on the track, can range from drumbeats to synth notes), allowing you to add to and manipulate the music however you see fit while earning bonus points in the process.

The other major focus of the gameplay is scratching, which lets you "freestyle" with a set of thematically similar sounds called "battle records"—with one sound assigned to each of the five buttons—that you can manipulate with the fader and turntable in the same way a real DJ would. You can do this during "scratch windows" (think *Rock Band* drum fills), "scratch solos" (think activating Star Power), or just whenever there's a break in between scrolling notes.

Thanks to some slick pattern recognition, the game will recognize any of the hundreds of standard scratching tricks that you happen to perform, and award you accordingly. And if you're unfamiliar with scratching, don't worry: alongside a suite of tutorials, you can't actually fail a song. You can fall short of audience expectations, but you'll never be forced to stop.

We're still waiting on a lot of the details (pricing, for instance), but we do know that all you wannabe DJs will be spinning by the end of the summer. Stay tuned.

Scott Butterworth

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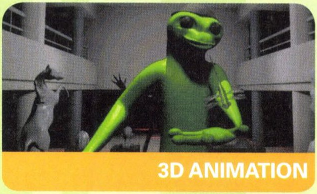
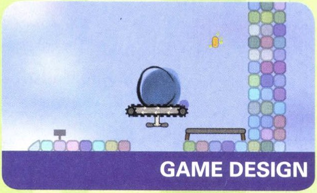
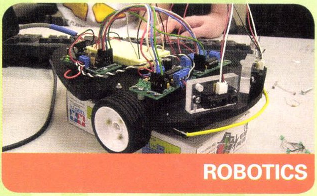


3D ANIMATION



GAME DESIGN



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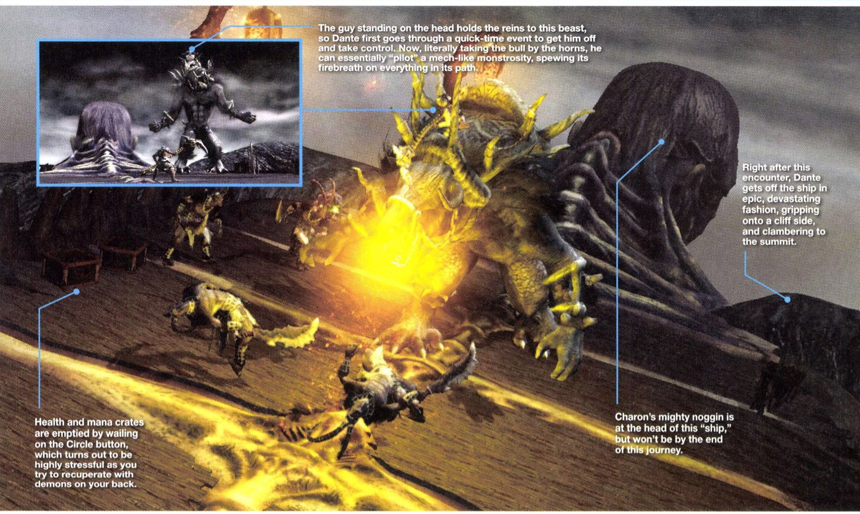


The guy standing on the head holds the reins to this beast, so Dante first goes through a quick-time event to get him off and take control. Now, literally taking the bull by the horns, he can essentially "pilot" a mech-like monstrosity, spewing its firebreath on everything in its path.

Right after this encounter, Dante gets off the ship in epic, devastating fashion, gripping onto a cliff side, and clambering to the summit.

Health and mana crates are emptied by wailing on the Circle button, which turns out to be highly stressful as you try to recuperate with demons on your back.

Charon's mighty noggin is at the head of this "ship," but won't be by the end of this journey.

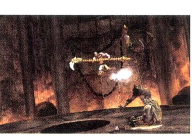
PS3 | P

Dante's Inferno

Classic. Poetic. Violent. Beatdown

PS3 AVAILABLE: 2010 GENRE: Action PUBLISHER: EA DEVELOPER: EA Redwood Shores

Hands-On Preview



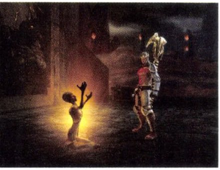
When near death, Dante finishes these demons by leaping onto their backs and pulling off their heads!

The concept, at first, appears plain bizarre. EA taps classic 14th century Italian literature as the inspiration for its latest game franchise. Dante Alighieri's lauded *Divine Comedy* is a love story, a deep allegory of passion, virtue, faith, and the nature and punishment of sin (but we're sure you knew that already from whatever education system you've been through). The first (and most famous) part of this convenient trilogy is *Inferno,* a stylish jaunt through Hell for the author and his sidekick, the Roman poet Virgil.

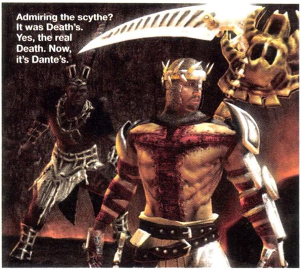
Wait a minute. The story is told in first-person; the lead character smashes through the gates of Hell, entering the opening "level," the first circle of nine that follows a natural progression concluding with an encounter with Lucifer himself. Characters as bold and monstrous as Minos, Judge of the Dead, and Charon, the boatman for damned souls across the River of Acheron populate the increasingly brutal circles. And the purpose, the goal, to rescue a true love called Beatrice (whose soul was nabbed by Lucifer) is delightfully noble and poetic.

Now apply a game filter to that outline and it resonates with substance, natural plotting, and the potential to redefine our expectations for the themes and inspirations we're fed by these interactive experiences.

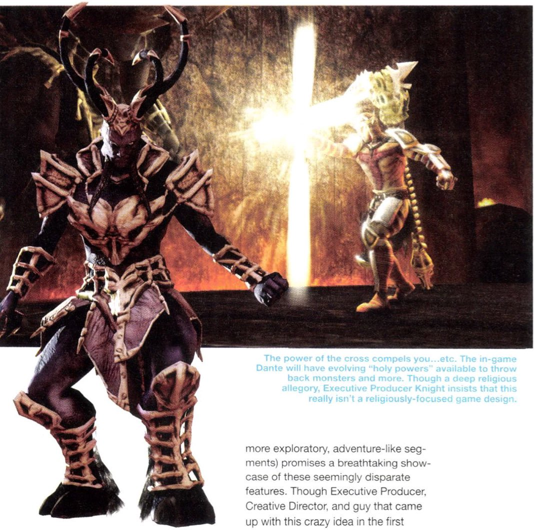
But EA's *Dante's Inferno* is no educational travelogue. Gaming-up the original story means Dante is now a scythe-wielding über-warrior (he kills Death and procures his iconic soul reaper in the opening level), chiseled on the battlefields of the Crusades, and hell-bent on smacking down that thieving Lucifer. This *Inferno* is packed with monsters of epic scale (and we know we didn't see the biggest or baddest in our early hands-on test). It uses gameplay health and mana regen-



Dante will meet Shades at regular points in the game, and will have to choose to Absolve or Punish them. Why, and the consequence of those decisions isn't clear yet, but this is apparently going to play a significant role in how the game progression plays out.



Admiring the scythe? It was Death's. Yes, the real Death. Now, it's Dante's.



The power of the cross compels you...etc. The in-game Dante will have evolving "holy powers" available to throw back monsters and more. Though a deep religious allegory, Executive Producer Knight insists that this really isn't a religiously-focused game design.

eration mechanics straight out of Tecmo's *Ninja Gaiden* series, which is needed as you swirl, twirl, hack and slash with the voracity, style, and intensity of a certain other gaming Dante. This *Dante's Inferno* is the "God of Ninja Colossus May Cry." Yeah, that sounds like a game.

Blending quick-time events among spectacular hack-and-slash moments (and hints from the developers at more exploratory, adventure-like segments) promises a breathtaking showcase of these seemingly disparate features. Though Executive Producer, Creative Director, and guy that came up with this crazy idea in the first place, Jonathan Knight, told us the game was still a year from release, he promised, "It's a huge game for EA, and will get a ton of polish."

We could very well be true believers in the months ahead. Expect much, much more on this one as the movie version is signed with Universal (and a to-be-named Oscar-nominated screenwriter is working with Knight on the script), and the buzz is only just beginning.

Rob Smith

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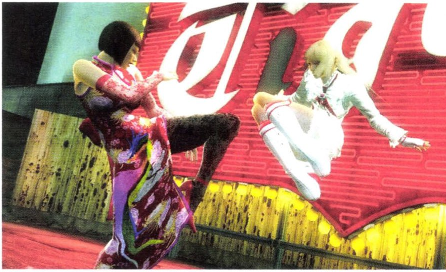
PlayStation Gallery

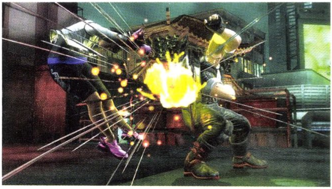
Updates, sneak peeks, works-in-progress

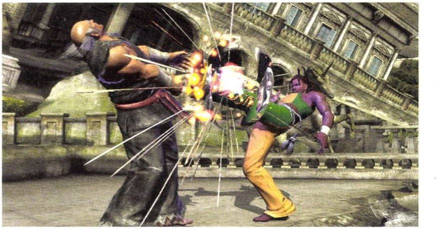
Tekken 6 Update

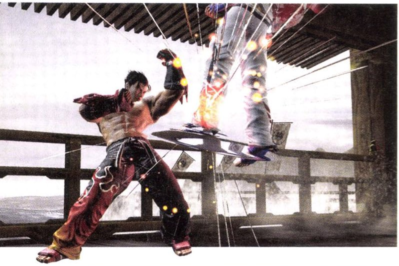
PS3 AVAILABLE: Fall GENRE: Fighting
PUBLISHER: Namco Bandai DEVELOPER: Namco Bandai

With *Street Fighter IV* dominating the in-house recreational playtime, the fighting genre is experiencing a rebirth here at PTOM Towers. This latest batch of *Tekken 6* screenshots merely adds more fuel to the fighting-game fire as we enter what may well be a next-gen renaissance for the genre. Sporting the largest character roster in its storied history, *T6* will have 40 playable characters, including six brand new fighters. You can also create your own fighter and customize attributes ranging from hairstyle, apparel, accessories, tattoos, and more. Head online with any in-game or created character to face-off against opponents from around the world. As new game details remain sparse, we'll let the pictures do most of the talking for now. Roger





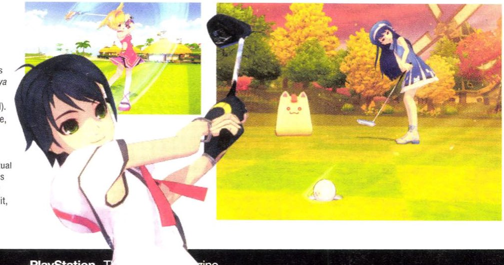




Pangya First Look

PSP AVAILABLE: Spring GENRE: Golf RPG
PUBLISHER: TOMY Corporation DEVELOPER: Ntreev

If casual game champion *Hot Shots Golf* is Phil Mickelson (always interesting, but never likely to unseat Tiger), then consider *Pangya* the Camilo Villegas, the stylish, quirky, upstart pretender. (You know—if you're a golf fan and those names mean anything at all). Artistically, *Pangya* is anime. Gameplay-wise, it's golf. Story-wise, it's an RPG, set in nine fantasy-themed golf courses. You'll play through the stories of 18 different characters (yes, you'll get to dress them and see them pouting innocently at you in typical Japanese dialogue box scenes). I can't judge yet whether the actual golf is any good, but if the idea of an anime style golf game drains your putt, keep an eye out for *Pangya* (the title isn't finalized, but I'm sure you'll recognize this unique game the next time you see it, whatever it's called). Teresa



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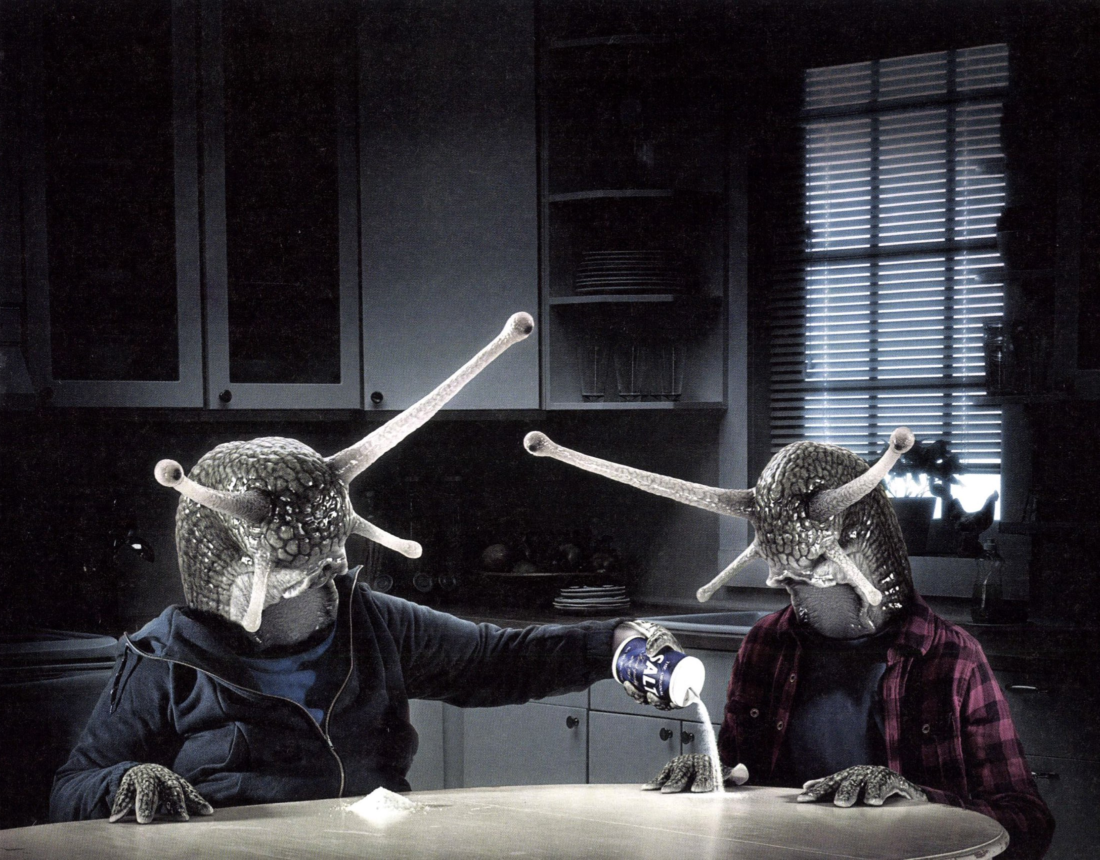
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GOD OF

RAGE, OBSESSION, & KRATOS-STYLE ASS-WHUPPIN'

Vengeance without inhibition; pain to absolve heartache—the god of war has returned, hell bent on ripping out the heart of Olympus. We've got the down 'n' dirty details from the world's first live gameplay demo. So much brutality, and fury, and despair...it's almost cathartic.

By Teresa Dun

Prologue
Deliver sweet vengeance, oh god of war

It begins with shadows. Black. Swirling. A distant torch casts ghostly outlines, flickering on a rocky wall. First, you hear the breathing; a single harsh, ragged exhale. Next, the footsteps; pounding like drumbeats, echoing, echoing, echoing through the cavernous space, accompanied by the faint percussion of metal on metal. Finally, an ashen figure bursts into view. The familiar scowl, the distinctive, red body paint, the ferocious scar across his right eye. He raises a single deadly blade...

It's Kratos, the god of war. Thirsty as ever for vengeance, and keen to unleash pain to anyone who stands in his way. As his blade swings into the bony ribs of an undead skeleton, Kratos howls in fury, and it's clear: this tragic tale of a man betrayed by the gods of Olympus will have an epic finale, one worthy of the legacy established by its predecessors.

Parodos
Watch and sing, blessed observer

I'm in Los Angeles, at a cozy little theater to see *God of War III* in action for the first time. The developers from Sony Santa Monica have just shown the game's latest trailer (download it yourself from the PS Store) beautifully rendered from in-game footage.

Now, they're guiding us through a live gameplay demo. Stig Asmussen, *God of War III's* game director, enthuses about Kratos' next-gen character model, and all eyes are glued to the screen, mesmerized more by Kratos' smooth animations as he battles skeletons in a dark cave than by the insane number of polygons piecing him together. Asmussen mentions "scale," and "gameplay experience," and "spectacle," but none of it registers until he leads Kratos out of the cave, and onto the ruined base of Mount Olympus.

Blood is dirty. It leaves marks (at least, temporarily) on Kratos' armor, weapons, clothing, and skin.

Thanks to a "rim shader," Kratos "glows" faintly, making him stand out in the environment. His weapons gleam in the light, too.

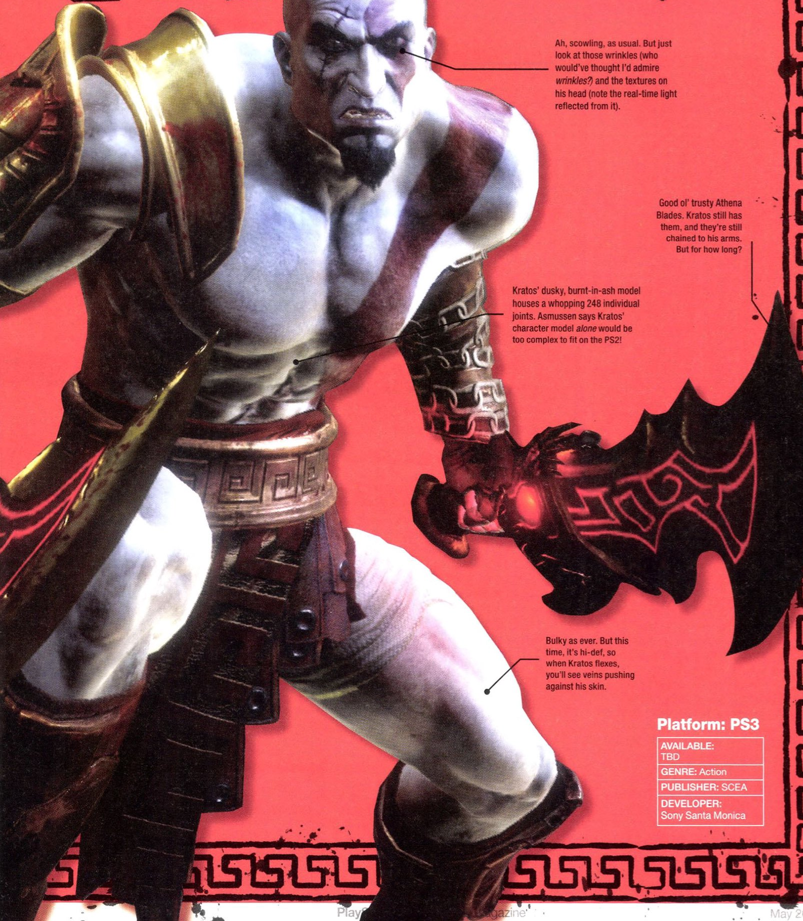
'Ιου ιου. τα παντ αν εξηκοι σαφη.
Ω φωσ, τελευταιον σε προσβλεψαιμι νυν,
οστισ πεφασμαι φυσ τ' αφ' ων ου χρην,
ζυν οισ τ'ϖου χρην ομιλων, ουσ τε μ' ουκ εδει
κρανων.

–Οεδιπυσ, Οεδιπυσ Ρεξ

O god-all come true, all burst to light! O light-now let me look my last on you! I stand revealed at last—cursed in my birth, cursed in marriage, cursed in the lives I cut down with these hands!

–Oedipus, Oedipus Rex

WAR III



Ah, scowling, as usual. But just look at those wrinkles (who would've thought I'd admire *wrinkles?*) and the textures on his head (note the real-time light reflected from it).

Good ol' trusty Athena Blades. Kratos still has them, and they're still chained to his arms. But for how long?

Kratos' dusky, burnt-in-ash model houses a whopping 248 individual joints. Asmussen says Kratos' character model *alone* would be too complex to fit on the PS2!

Bulky as ever. But this time, it's hi-def, so when Kratos flexes, you'll see veins pushing against his skin.

Platform: PS3

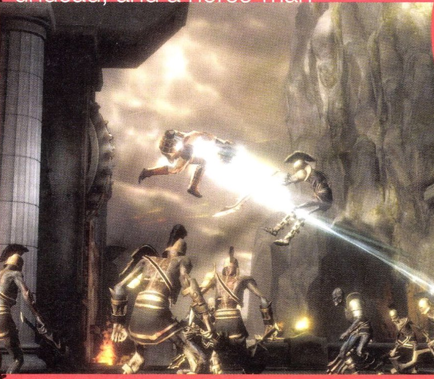
AVAILABLE: TBD

GENRE: Action

PUBLISHER: SCEA

DEVELOPER: Sony Santa Monica

First Episode The endless undead, and a horse-man

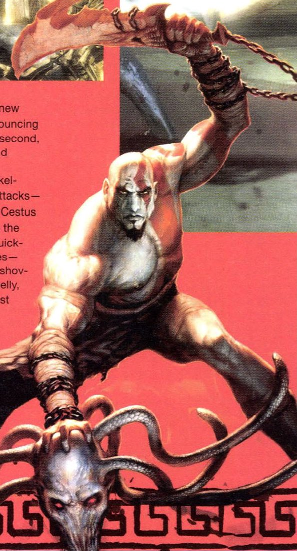


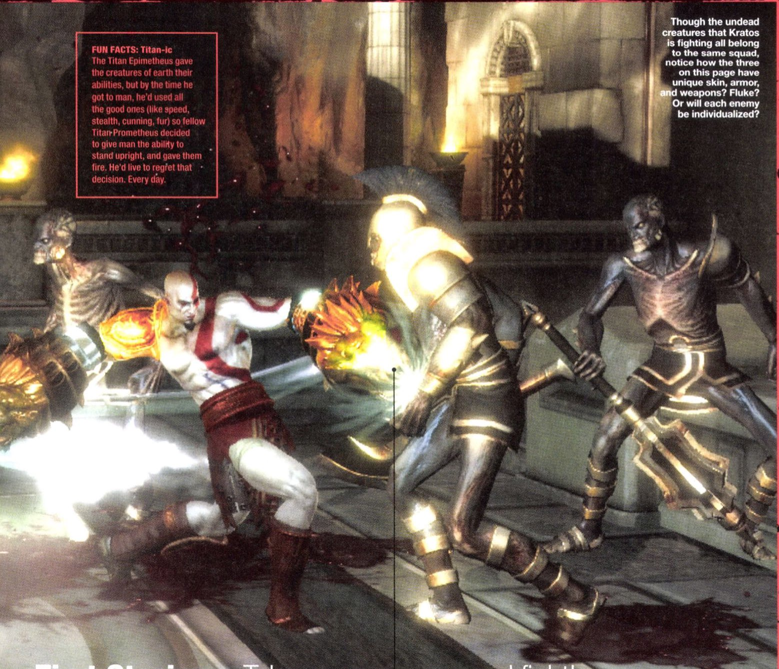
The courtyard leading onto the foothold of Mount Olympus was once grand. Opulent pillars, marble tiles, grandiose archways…perhaps just a few days (hours?) before Kratos' arrival, they had stood proudly, marking the entrance to the house of gods. But now, the marble floor is crumbling, tempting you to a rocky death, and the pillars have toppled.

Kratos takes a step into the courtyard. Immediately, a dozen undead soldiers spawn, crawling mysteriously out of the floor. They rush forward. Kratos responds with his Athena Blades, using light and heavy attack combos, jump attacks—you know, the familiar stuff—and they fall quickly under his blade.

But then, a centaur arrives—he's the commander of the undead soldiers—and as he barks out orders in an unknown tongue, the undead act with more caution and intelligence. First, they hover around Kratos, not moving in. Kratos utilizes a new move: he grabs a single enemy and holding him up like a human (well, undead) shield, slams him into half a dozen other minions, as if the being in his hand were a battering ram. Next, the undead try a new tactic. They tackle Kratos to the floor, pouncing as a group to pin him down, but after a second, Kratos roars up in a ray of white light and tosses them all aside.

One by one, Kratos polishes off the skeletons. Now, the centaur. In a series of attacks—some utilizing Kratos' new weapon, the Cestus (see page 47) and some performed with the familiar, reflex-based, button-tapping Quick-Time Events (QTE) of the previous games—Kratos weakens the centaur, eventually shoving him down, slashing open his underbelly, and pulling out his vital organs as the rest of his guts and intestines spill onto the floor. Bloody brilliant.





FUN FACTS: Titan-ic
The Titan Epimetheus gave the creatures of earth their abilities, but by the time he got to man, he'd used all the good ones (like speed, stealth, cunning, fur) so fellow Titan Prometheus decided to give man the ability to stand upright, and gave them fire. He'd live to regret that decision. Every day.

Though the undead creatures that Kratos is fighting all belong to the same squad, notice how the three on this page have unique skin, armor, and weapons? Fluke? Or will each enemy be individualized?

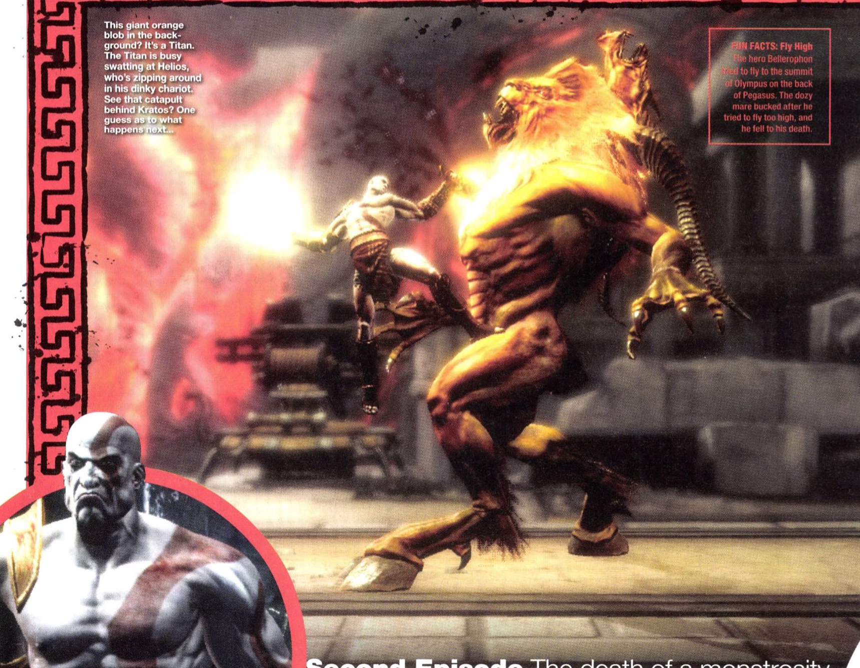
First Stasimon Take up your arms, and fight!

When I saw the centaur's pinkish intestines wiggle onto the blood-smeared marble, I admit it: I gasped. But I wasn't alone. The rest of the audience reacted not just to the sudden gore, but to the...oh, how do I put it? Pitch perfect next-gen combat style and visuals you'd hope and even expect for a next-gen *GoW* game. The classic combo-based attacks are still the heart of the combat system, along with the QTE moments in the tougher battles, but it's all been *enhanced.*

Take the grab ability. Besides the battering ram move mentioned already, Kratos can grab an enemy and rip him in half with his bare hands. Or he can grab an enemy, drag him to a wall, and bash his head in multiple times. (Yes, you'll be able to interact with different parts of the environment.) Kratos will also be able to perform magic attacks and switch weapons on the fly during the heat of battle.

Speaking of weapons: the Cestus. It's a series of heavy rings chained to each of Kratos' arms with a lion's head at the very end. When Kratos thrusts his arms forward, the rings hit each other, and eventually slide to the head of the weapon and create a huge, powerful impact, which you can slam into an enemy. Alternately, since they *are* on chains, Kratos can also push the rings to the end of the chain and "clap" them together, ideally with an enemy or two in between.

What's the inspiration for the Cestus, and *all* the yet-to-be-announced weapons in *God of War III?* Surprisingly, it's the *God of War* series' own Athena Blades. Asmussen explains that even with several weapons to choose from in *GoW* and *GoW II,* gamers generally gravitated back toward the Blades, because they offered the most entertainment. So, expect all the new weapons to have a variety of attack styles and fun, satisfying animations.



This giant orange blob in the background? It's a Titan. The Titan is busy swatting at Helios, who's zipping around in his dinky chariot. See that catapult behind Kratos? One guess as to what happens next...

FUN FACTS: Fly High The hero Bellerophon tried to fly to the summit of Olympus on the back of Pegasus. The dozy mare bucked after he tried to fly too high, and he fell to his death.

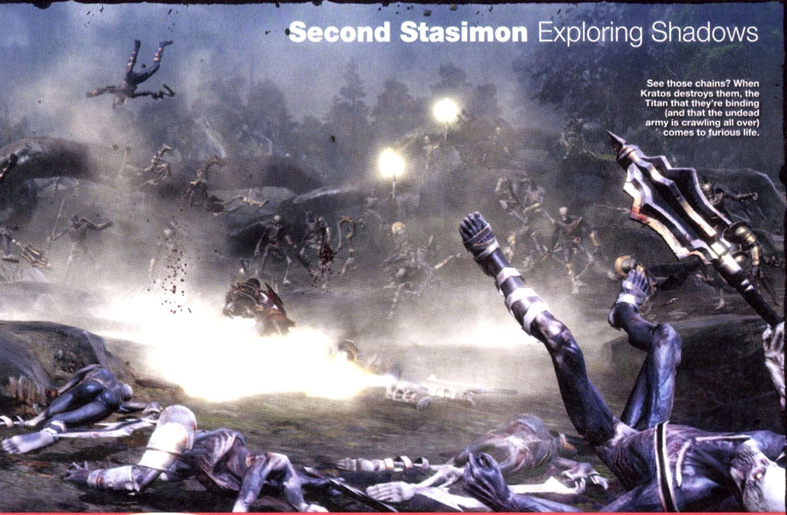
Second Episode The death of a monstrosity

Here's something I didn't tell you, but if you're smart, you've noticed already.

While Kratos was fighting the undead peons and the centaur, a fiery Titan in the background hurls rocks at the sun god, Helios. Through a twist in the story in *GoW II*, Kratos has freed the Titans, and they're spoiling for a fight against the gods of Olympus. While Kratos' goal in this gameplay demo is to find the hidden Door of Eos, which will allegedly lead him to the palace of Olympus, that doesn't mean he can't intervene in the titanic war occurring around him.

So when Kratos leaves the dead centaur—and its wiggling guts—behind, he heads for a catapult that he can use to knock Helios' chariot out of the sky. But before he can reach it, a chimera appears: it's a mythological monstrosity, part snake, part lion, part goat. The camera smartly zooms in to snag a better view when Kratos lands an especially impactful blow, and using the same combination of wits, reflex, and agility, Kratos beats down each of the beast's three forms. Kratos ends the battle with a flourish: he snaps one of the chimera's horns in half, lifts it, and then spears the chimera through the face. Then, he goes to the catapult, shoots a giant arrow, pierces Helios' chariot...and Helios hurtles through the air while the Titan turns to continue its rampage of destruction elsewhere. It happens quickly, smoothly, and beautifully.

Second Stasimon Exploring Shadows



See those chains? When Kratos destroys them, the Titan that they're binding (and that the undead army is crawling all over) comes to furious life.

Each action (like this slash of the Athena blade) will have several possible sound effects. This it to ensure the audio doesn't get stale.

FUN FACTS: Party
Dionysus is the god of both wine and fertility. Everyday's a party at that guy's house.

Now, think about that for a moment. While Kratos was fighting the chimera, a *giant lava creature* was going haywire in the distance—hurling rocks, destroying buildings in real-time—and an enraged little sun god was zipping around, shooting fire arrows through the air. All in what is supposed to be the *background.* This is so far beyond the PS2's abilities, and even seems to push those of the PS3. In essence, impressive.

Now, take it a step further and think about the *shadows:* Helios with his fiery arrows, the Titan's boulders, the collapsing buildings, the myriad enemies, and Kratos himself, they're all casting shadows. All of them moving and updating in real-time. And impressively, the live demo was performed without a single noticeable hiccup.

Okay, take it one last step further. Imagine all of this detail—the shadows, the "backgrounds," the combat—taking place on *top* of a moving, living, breathing Titan, except instead of a palace you're in a dense forest full of trees (yes, I'm referring to the *GoW III* trailer). When the Titan moves left, everything has to shift realistically. If the Titan sneezes, everything has to jump, then fall, again realistically. And it all has to be done via the in-game engine, as there isn't a single CG cutscene in the game. And Asmussen asserts that the vision of Sony Santa Monica is to have *GoW III* redefine scale—in other words, the whole game will be colossal, full of Titans or mass hordes, and sweepingly *epic.*

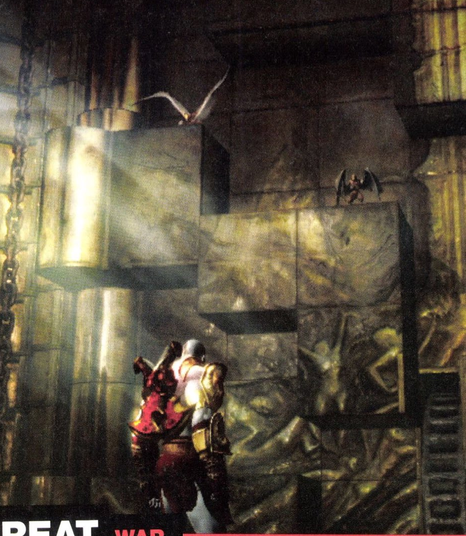
According to the tech whizzes at Sony Santa Monica, this type of collision and depth can *only* be achieved with the vast processing power of the PS3. So it's possible, if other developers are as dedicated as this batch, we'll see the PS3 outshine its competition within the next couple of years.

Third Episode Chasms, harpies, and learning to soar

The god of war never tires. His next challenge, having aided the Titan, is to find a path across a deep chasm. Fortunately, a pack of harpies sitting peaceably (for once) in the distance give Kratos an idea. Taking out his fire bow, Kratos shoots one. Irritated, the harpies flock toward their attacker, conveniently parking themselves above the chasm. Kratos leaps onto a harpy, but before he tears off her wings in typical *GoW*-style, he slashes her with a knife, edging her forward. When the harpy falls, Kratos leaps onto the back of the next harpy, and repeats the process until he's across the chasm.

He then climbs up the face of a cliff, and visually, it's stunning. Not only are the textures of the rock hi-def and gritty, but the debris falls continuously, in realistic-looking clumps. Kratos leaps across platforms, grips tiny ledges with his fingers, slashes at the remaining harpies. Nothing new there, but it all seems more intense because of the stones raining down.

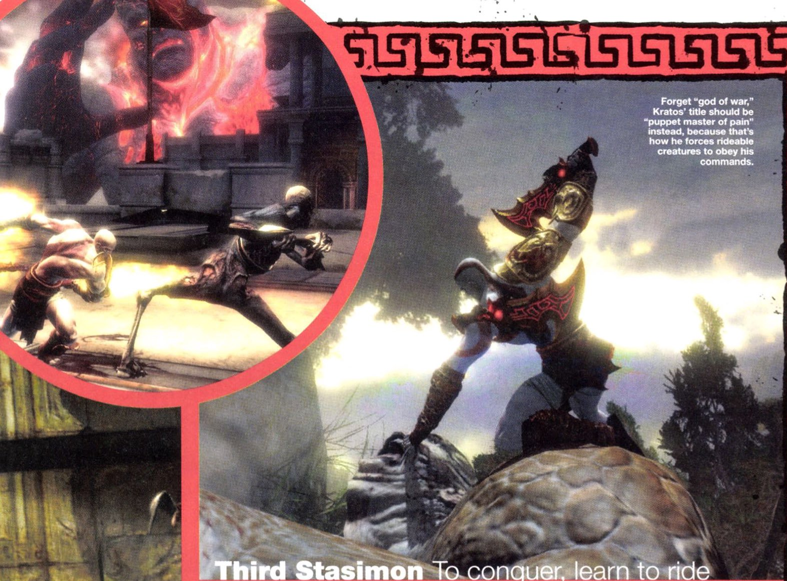
Finally, Kratos pulls himself up the top of the cliff. And there's Helios. Unconscious. Vulnerable. The god of war takes a step forward, blade raised…but of course, it's never that easy.



THE GREAT WAR

This, my friends, is a war of unparalleled scale—it's a war between gods and continent-sized Titans—and it's always present, whether in the smoke billowing in the distance as you solve a puzzle, the ruined decay of the once decadent Olympus as you platform to a new area, or the fights themselves, as gods and Titans hurl stones and fire upon each other while Kratos handles his own enemies nearby.

Story-wise, *God of War III* will bridge—and conclude—the story weaved in *GoW, GoW II, and GoW: Chains of Olympus.* But this time, you'll be treated to a ride through Kratos' psyche. According to Asmussen, it was always the studio's intention to show Kratos' mental process, but it just didn't quite happen in the other games. In *GoW III,* though, he promises a violent physical *and* emotional struggle. How? Via internal monologue. As Kratos enters a fight, you'll hear his thoughts and his interpretation of events. It's an intriguing idea, but Sony Santa Monica, promise me you won't turn bad-ass Kratos into some emo whiner. I doubt even his angry guttural mutterings would save him then.



Forget "god of war," Kratos' title should be "puppet master of pain" instead, because that's how he forces rideable creatures to obey his commands.

Third Stasimon To conquer, learn to ride

At first, I thought the scene where Kratos traverses the chasm using the harpies was scripted. But Asmussen elaborates that it wasn't. It's a puzzle. You have to manually force the harpies to move into place, and if you fail, you'll be sent to the last checkpoint. It's part of the new "rideable creatures" mechanic, in which you're able to ride and control the cyclopes, harpies, and a handful of other mythical beasts.

The commands will be a simplified version of Kratos' own controls: you'll be able to move freely and you'll have two attacks that you can combo. However, visually, it'll be a lot more fun. For example, when you direct the Cyclops to step left, Kratos will stab it's left shoulder, causing the monster to shriek in anguish and lumber left out of *pain.* So the movement will be in spurts and lurches, but that should only add to the immersion. It's also a hell of a lot more entertaining.

HOLLYWOOD DOES MYTHOLOGY

Trust those paragons of historical (or mythological) detail in Hollywood to butcher the tradition of the classic Greek myths. A few dodgy special effects aren't the only culprits in bringing shame to the mighty Olympians' storied legacy; a few dialogue writers clearly forgot any classical training in their education for lines only a talent like Harry Hamlin could suitably deliver.

JASON AND THE ARGONAUTS
1963
DEFINING FEATURE: Ray Harryhausen's stop-motion animation technique brought to (jerky and undead) life those famous skeletons.
THE MYTH: Among many deviations, the famous clashing rocks did no harm to Jason.

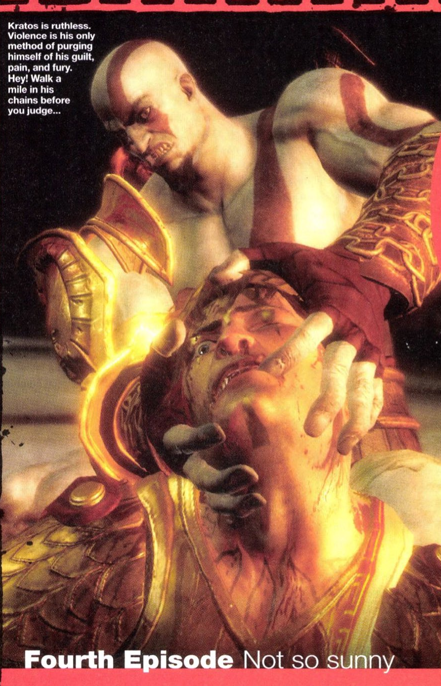
CLASH OF THE TITANS
1981
DEFINING FEATURE: All-time great thespian Lord Laurence Olivier, in his twilight years, playing Zeus.
THE MYTH: The Kraken, a titan set to eat the delectable Andromeda, was a Scandinavian monster, and never appeared in Greek mythology. Or Bubo, the mechanical (that's right) owl.

THE ADVENTURES OF BARON MUNCHAUSEN
1989
DEFINING FEATURE: Uma Thurman as Venus, rising in a clamshell. Oh to the My to the God. Okay, it's the Roman, not Greek name for the goddess of love, but we'll take it.
THE MYTH: Isn't this all the Baron's deranged hallucination? Fair play to him for getting that Venus action.

HERCULES
1997
DEFINING FEATURE: A slick-talking Hades who speaks quickly, profusely, and ceaselessly, as performed by an ad-libbing James Woods.
THE MYTH: Sure, the old tales were performed in chants and choruses, but this Disney adaptation? A bit too catchy and upbeat.

O BROTHER, WHERE ART THOU?
2000
DEFINING FEATURE: John Goodman as Daniel "Big Dan" Teague, a one-eyed con man pretending to sell Bibles.
THE MYTH: It's based on Homer's *Odyssey,* so Goodman is the Cyclops, the girls in the river are Sirens, the railroad hobo is Tiresias, and so on.

TROY
2004
DEFINING FEATURE: Brad Pitt's Achilles felled by Legolas.
THE MYTH: More legend since the original story is based on real events, but Agamemnon doesn't die at Troy, but is murdered by his wife, Clytemnestra, on his return from the war.



Kratos is ruthless. Violence is his only method of purging himself of his guilt, pain, and fury. Hey! Walk a mile in his chains before you judge...

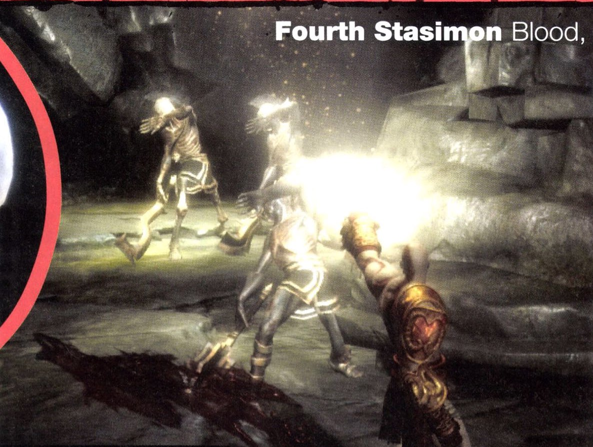
FUN FACTS: Head Ache
The goddess Athena was born out of Zeus' head after the ruler of the gods swallowed her mother.

Fourth Episode Not so sunny

Helios. Handsome, muscular, drives a chariot. For some reason, the guy's face grates on my nerves. Kratos has a similar inclination, judging from the scowl on his face when he steps toward the unconscious sun god. But before he can get to him, a phalanx of undead skeletons appears out of the ground. This time, they're equipped with glowing blue shields. A Cyclops also clambers toward you. It won't be easy to break down the skeletons' defense, so instead of trying, Kratos mounts the Cyclops and uses the lumbering beast to mow down the skeletons. When they're dead, well, Kratos no longer has any use for his mount. And of course, Kratos being Kratos has to deliver the goriest blow imaginable. He wraps one hand around the creature's eye, places the other on its neck for support, and then tugs, slowly, ever so slowly, so slowly you can almost hear the eye squeaking, until it pops clean out of the Cyclops's head. Kratos nimbly jumps away as the creature collapses, tosses the eye, and finally, reaches Helios.

The sun god is still unconscious. At first, I think Kratos is going to help him because he moves Helios into a sitting position, just like a sympathetic bystander would aid someone who's slipped on ice. But instead of administering a warm compress or rubbing Helios' back, Kratos puts both hands solidly around Helios' head...and tries to lift him. I'm confused. But then, Kratos pulls again, and I see marks appear around Helios' neck. My mind starts to reach a conclusion, but it's so...crude...that I can't believe it. But when Kratos yanks again and Helios' head detaches followed by a shower of blood, I can't deny it. Kratos just decapitated a god with his bare hands.

I can't help but question... is all this violence really necessary? The centaur's intestines, the chimera's head-on-a-horn shish kabob, the Cyclops' eyeball, the sun god's head... I relish the intensity, but is all this gore just for sensationalism?



Fourth Stasimon Blood, guts, and gore

Of course not! The violence serves a tangible purpose. First, with the addition of the internal monologues, we'll understand Kratos' motivation behind the violence. So it'll help enhance Kratos' tortured characterization. But what happens next in the demo is much more telling.

Kratos doesn't toss Helios' head away like he did the Cyclops' eye. Instead, he holds it up like a wand and waves it toward the wall behind him. Miraculously, the wall starts to glow and reveals the shape of a door (like the doors to Moria in *The Lord of the Rings)* and opens. Using the head of Helios, Kratos has successfully located the Door of Eos! Yes, gentlemen and ladies, the head of Helios is Kratos' new upgrade. It's first use: it reveals secrets.

But that's not all. When Kratos steps through the door, it's dark. Luckily, the sun god's head *glows.* That's its second purpose: it's a lantern. (You can tell the developers have the same appreciation for Helios that I do!) Third, when some undead enemies arrive, Kratos points Helios at them, and they're stunned by the brilliance, giving Kratos the perfect opportunity to strike. It's a clever blend of humor and violence, functionality and gratuitousness. And it's *awesome.*

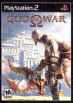
THE MAKING OF A GOD

If you haven't played the first two games, be aware that the following story synopsis includes spoilers.

GOD OF WAR

Kratos begins as an ambitious, bloodthirsty captain in Sparta's army, but when he's about to lose a battle against barbarians, he makes a bargain with Ares (the Greek god of war): he'd give the god his soul in exchange for a victory.

For a while, Ares helps Kratos win battle after battle… until the Greek god one day tricks Kratos into killing his wife and daughter. (Kratos' unusual gray skin is actually a curse: The ashes from his dead family cling to his skin.)



Furious at the betrayal, Kratos leaves Ares and begins serving other gods in exchange for forgiveness of his deed. Eventually, Athena asks him to stop Ares from destroying Athens. Kratos kills Ares and the gods forgive him, but don't let him *forget* his deed.

Distraught and haunted, Kratos attempts suicide, but Athena stops him and reveals he's been granted Ares' throne on Olympus. Kratos is the new god of war.

GOD OF WAR II

In his new position, Kratos ignores the orders of the other gods and uses his power solely to grant the Spartans (his old army) victory.

Zeus confronts him, eventually zapping his power and sending him to Hades, but the Titan Gaia rescues him and tells him to find the Fates to alter his destiny.

When the Fates refuse to help, Kratos kills them and rewinds his life back to his confrontation with Zeus.

PlayStation.2
GOD OF WAR II

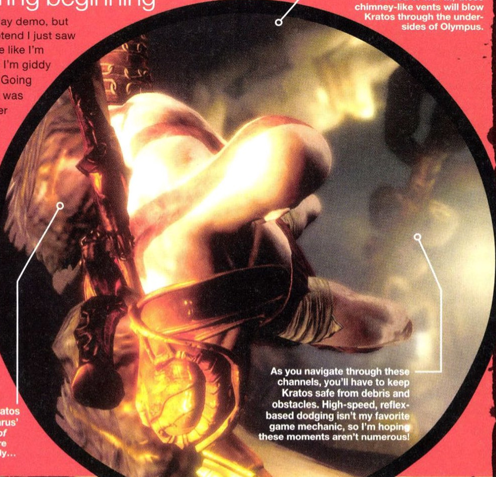
They fight, and just when Kratos is about to win, Athena intervenes. Kratos then kills her, but her dying words reveal that Kratos is Zeus' son.

Kratos goes back in time again, to the War of the Titans, and asks the Titans to accompany him back to his own time, so they can finish their battle against the gods. And that's where *God of War III* begins, and we prepare to discover the rest of Kratos' tragic story.

Epilogue A stirring beginning

It was only a 20-minute gameplay demo, but I'm already impressed. No, pretend I just saw Helios' head, because it's more like I'm *stunned.* (Sorry, lame joke, but I'm giddy just thinking about this game.) Going in, I already assumed *God of War III* was going to be *good*...because the other *God of War* games were so well made. But the demo brought the series to a whole new level—the next-gen level.

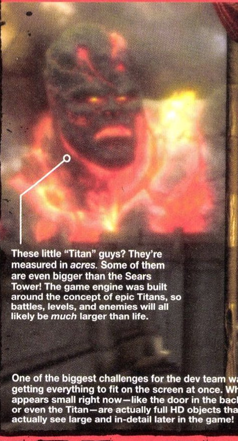
Everything—the graphics, the combat, the level design, the sneaky humor, the thought process behind every tiny choice, and yes, the gore—was executed so flawlessly. Of course, this was just a tightly controlled snippet of the game, but if the final, full experience lives up to the quality of this demo (and I'm *so* hoping it will... don't let me down, Kratos!), *God of War III* will be technically leaps and bounds beyond anything the PS3 has seen to date. ■



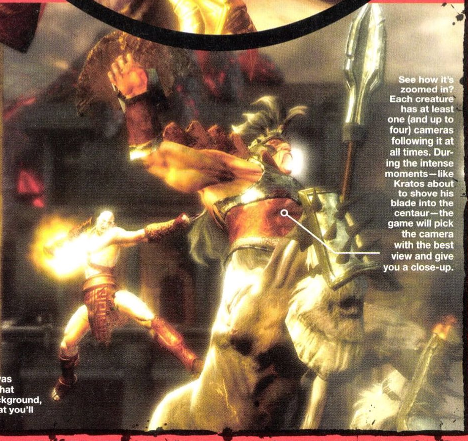
As a form of transportation in *God of War III,* these chimney-like vents will blow Kratos through the undersides of Olympus.

The wings Kratos tore off of Icarus' back in *God of War II* will sure come in handy...

As you navigate through these channels, you'll have to keep Kratos safe from debris and obstacles. High-speed, reflex-based dodging isn't my favorite game mechanic, so I'm hoping these moments aren't numerous!



These little "Titan" guys? They're measured in *acres.* Some of them are even bigger than the Sears Tower! The game engine was built around the concept of epic Titans, so battles, levels, and enemies will all likely be *much* larger than life.



See how it's zoomed in? Each creature has at least one (and up to four) cameras following it at all times. During the intense moments—like Kratos about to shove his blade into the centaur—the game will pick the camera with the best view and give you a close-up.

One of the biggest challenges for the dev team was getting everything to fit on the screen at once. What appears small right now—like the door in the background, or even the Titan—are actually full HD objects that you'll actually see large and in-detail later in the game!

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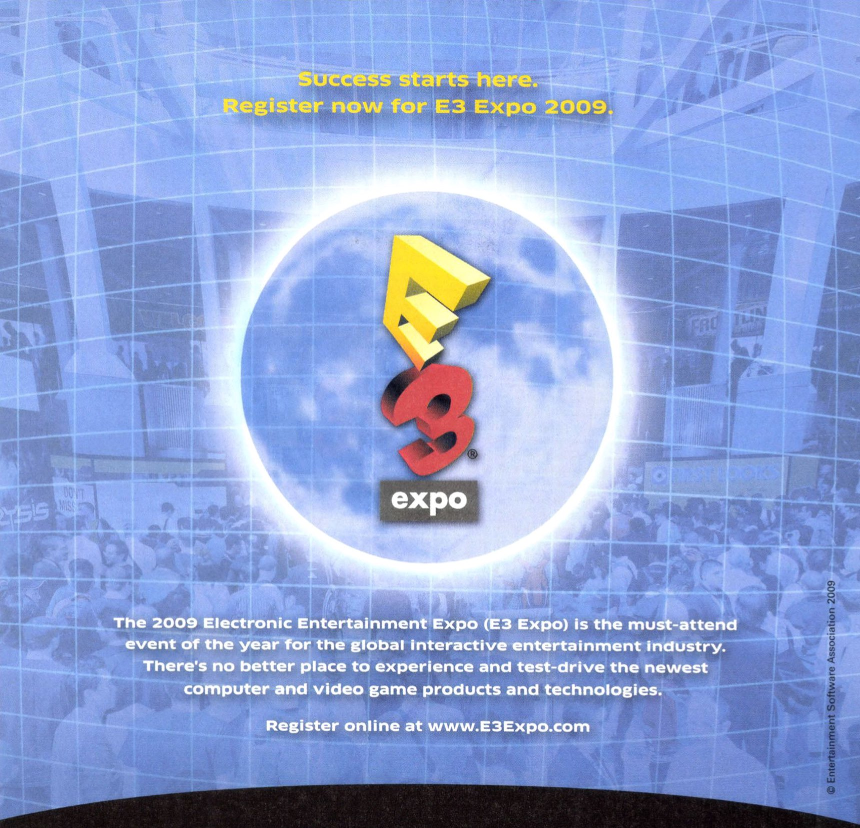

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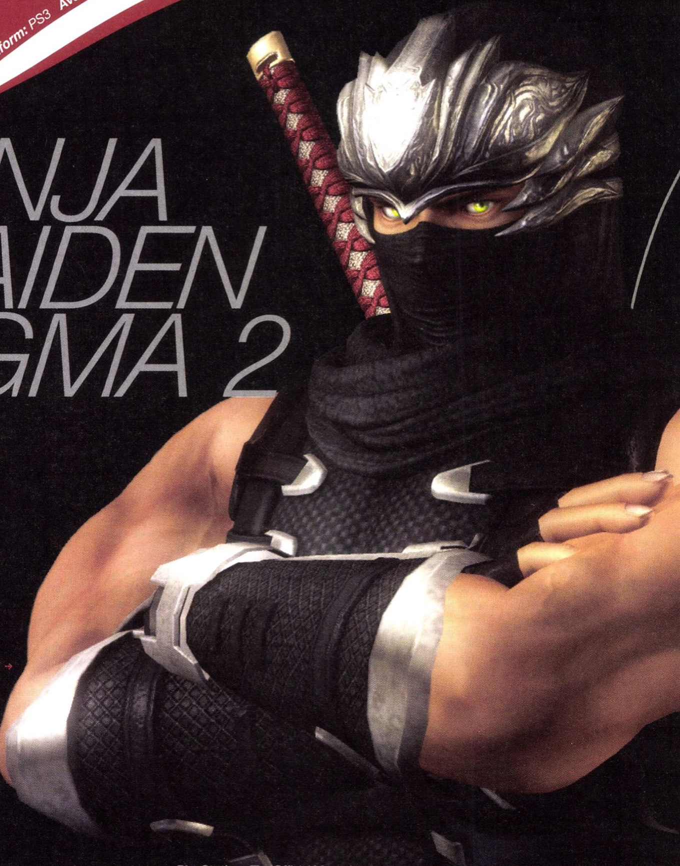
WORLD EXCLUSIVE!

Platform: PS3 **Available:** Fall **Genre:** Action **Publisher:** Tecmo **Developer:** Team Ninja

NINJA GAIDEN SIGMA 2



Ryu Hayabusa →

The sequel to the **greatest ninja game ever made** comes to the PS3,

↖ *Ayane*

complete with new characters, new bosses, and new modes!

BY SCOTT BUTTERWORTH

It's snowing in Tokyo today. The windows of the Tecmo offices are beginning to frost over, the heater is humming quietly in the back of the demo room, and I'm watching a ninja fight the Statue of Liberty.

Oh my God, I'm going to fight the *Statue of Liberty.*

"This isn't final," the PR rep quickly points out. "We don't want people to think you're trying to destroy the Statue of Liberty." Apparently master ninja Ryu Hayabusa is merely attempting to free her, as she's been possessed by a powerful Fiend. And Lady Liberty certainly looks the part: her eyes blaze with an ominous electric-blue glow, and her hands appear to be shackled by massive handcuffs (powerful imagery indeed). But frankly, I'm too entranced by the fact that a monstrous hunk of anthropomorphic iron is currently trying to crush me to think too deeply about the metaphoric implications of a battle to liberate liberty, so to speak.

So as the snow softly falls on the city outside, I sit warm indoors, marveling at fantastic conflicts between ancient warriors and animated monuments, and absorbing lovingly assembled montages of beautiful women, exotic locales, and spectacularly-severed limbs. And it becomes pretty clear: Team Ninja, known for its passion for style, has not missed a beat in its evolution, and with the PS3 exclusive *Ninja Gaiden Sigma 2,* will remind gamers everywhere that this studio is one of the industry's star players.

Thanks to her short swords, Ayane is well equipped to execute super-quick combos, which is a big plus since the game has an arcade-style hit-counter now. The giant pink bow helps, too.

Momiji →

SIGMA, in mathematics, denotes the summation of many similar parts. Appropriately, that's what the *Sigma* branch of the *Ninja Gaiden* franchise is all about: delivering not just an experience that was previously unavailable on our platform but providing the most comprehensive and definitive form of that experience.

So just as the original *Ninja Gaiden Sigma* added spectacular next-gen graphics and all-new game modes to the already superb original Xbox game, *Ninja Gaiden Sigma 2* takes the relatively recent *Ninja Gaiden II* (which hit the Xbox 360 last summer) and introduces upgraded features and gameplay, and hoards of new content—including two new playable characters, a highly-demanded online co-op mode, and at least one boss based on a famous national landmark—that draws on all the best elements of each installment in the series.

The result, according to the official positioning of this new game, will be a sleeker, cleaner, and more complete version of the well-received 360 title. But since many of us one-console warriors probably haven't played that incarnation of the game, let's start at the beginning.

FOR THE UNINITIATED

Imagine, for a moment, your ideal ninja game. What would it include? There's an excellent chance that the game you're thinking of is *Ninja Gaiden Sigma,* the PS3's version of the first game in the franchise reboot—simply titled *Ninja Gaiden*—that (re)established the series' staples that comprise the core of every modern *Ninja Gaiden* game.

In it, we followed young ninja master Ryu Hayabusa on his quest to avenge the devastation of his clan and to reclaim the Dark Dragon Blade from an evil emperor who was, in actuality, an inhuman monster. The game established the franchise's now trademark mix of fantasy and mysticism, as well as its persistent juxtaposition of modern technology and traditional combat.

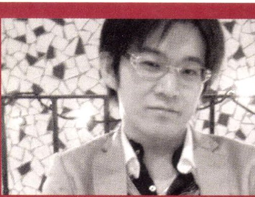
RYU HAYABUSA AGE: 21 PROFESSION: Badass Ninja FIGHTING STYLE: Hayabusa-style Ninjutsu WEAPON OF CHOICE: Dragon Sword HEROES: Bruce Lee, Mr. Rogers FIRST JOB: Teppanyaki Chef FAVORITE KUNG FU FILM: "A true Ninja does not pursue such empty distractions. I prefer not to indulge in activities that do not pertain to my larger task. *Enter the Dragon* was pretty good, though."

But far more importantly, *Ninja Gaiden Sigma* featured one of the most infamously challenging, yet undeniably addictive, fighting mechanics ever to grace an action game.

Its weapons-based combat offered furious speed and intensity. Ryu's seemingly endless arsenal of acrobatic maneuvers—from elaborate wall running to flamboyant finishing techniques, all fluidly animated—made him a deadly blur. Any enemy foolish enough to attack instantly received a healthy dose of sword in the face. But it demanded patience, discipline, and mastery of the game's combo-heavy mechanics, which meant a steep learning curve and, for ➔

Naturally, you'll battle all sorts of grotesque fiends and monsters, from werewolves to dragons. Just think of the game as the world's deadliest petting zoo!

THE PATH OF *ENLIGHTENMENT*



When we heard Lead Designer Yosuke Hayashi describe himself as a ninja in an interview, we had to ask him why:

"When someone says 'here is a super cool ninja,' visually you know what it looks like. But you really don't know what goes into making or producing or coming up with the ninja. You don't know where this super cool ninja came from. But if someone tells you, "Oh, there's a super cool ninja," you know what he's going to do. Like, you can visually imagine what he's going to do and how he's going to perform his movements and so forth. So what I'm saying is, how that applies to me is, I produce games, I create games. And all I want for the end-user and for the public's eye to see is what I put out as a final product. To me, It doesn't matter if they know the process or how much hard work and how much time and energy go into creating a product. That's where I earn my sense of accomplishment. In a way, you don't really even need to know, or to prove, or even to show the behind the scenes of what goes into creating the perfect ninja. As long as you know he's going to perform. Or as long as you know you put everything into that product and it's being presented to the world, that's all that matters to me."

Ryu's seemingly endless arsenal of acrobatic maneuvers—from elaborate wall running to flamboyant finishing techniques—made him a deadly blur.

some, an insurmountable level of frustration.

THE NEXT KARATE KID

That's why *Ninja Gaiden II* (and, likewise, *Ninja Gaiden Sigma 2)* includes a few important concessions that ameliorate certain rage-inducing aspects. Though all of Ryu's badass ninja skills are not only present but are flashier and smoother than ever, you'll now be able to choose between two different difficulty settings (the first *Sigma* only had one). Plus, the health system has changed dramatically, replenishing automatically once you clear an area of enemies. But it won't always refill completely since you'll gradually accumulate "lasting damage" as your health drops—although you can rid yourself of all damage at any save point or by finding some good old-fashioned elixirs.

Despite these potentially helpful changes, *Sigma 2* should still present quite a legitimate challenge. According to the developers, finding a happy medium is a delicate process. "We feel like, with every installment we've brought out, yes it's challenging, but we don't want to create a game that is so challenging that it's 'Game Over,' you're not going to want to go back again," explains Yosuke Hayashi, Team Ninja Studio Head and *Sigma 2's* Lead Designer. "We do still want to have this addictive gameplay experience. We are trying to find the right balance of what is challenging enough, but not to the extreme where you feel like you've been defeated."

NINJA NOUVEAU

You'll also see updates to the Ninpos (the *Ninja Gaiden* version of

Team Ninja didn't quite confirm it, but this certainly looks like a co-op Ninpo attack, doesn't it?

CRUSHING FANG
A giant, *Final Fantasy*-esque sword with a rounded top and an oni head engraved at the base. Can be used to perform aerial combos on even the heaviest enemies.

magic) with new spells like Art of the Phoenix Flames and the Art of Piercing Void joining the roster. Ryu's armory has also grown as it now includes such ridiculously awesome weapons as the Eclipse Scythe and Falcon's Talons, though old favorites like the Lunar Staff and Vigoorian Flail nunchucks appear as well.

Sigma 2's story is also a distinct departure from the first game. Gone is the fictional world of the Vigoor Empire, and in its place are exotic real-world locations like Venice, New York, Tokyo, and the Amazon, which Team Ninja hopes will create a deeper connection between Ryu and the player by adding a dimension of realism. Despite this small dose of reality, the mix of fantasy and mysticism from the first games remains prevalent.

> *The plot picks up one year after the conclusion of the first Sigma with a CIA agent named Sonia inquiring after Ryu in a small shop in Tokyo.*

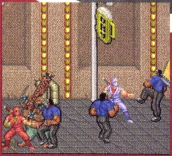
The plot picks up one year after the conclusion of the first *Sigma* with a CIA agent named Sonia inquiring after Ryu in a small shop in Tokyo. Apparently, he's needed to save the world from the resurrection of the Archfiend—presumably the biggest and baddest of *Ninja Gaiden's* ghoulish monsters, known as Fiends. But before she has a chance to explain this to him, she's captured by the dastardly Black Spider Clan (who couldn't be more conspicuously evil if they walked around holding giant signs that say, "Seriously not evil"). Now Ryu must rescue her and recover the Demon Statue that the Fiends plan to use to raise their boss from the dead. Sounds like fun! And it will definitely bring with it all sorts of new Fiends to slaughter.

THERE WILL (NOT) BE BLOOD

But while *Sigma 2* may share many of its core elements—such as the story, health system, and basic gameplay—with *Ninja Gaiden II,* the two games also deviate in a few

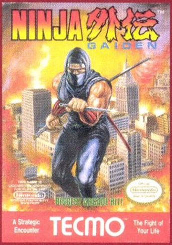
➔

NINJA REKISHI: A QUICK JOURNEY THROUGH GAIDEN'S 21-YEAR HISTORY



NINJA GAIDEN (ARCADE)

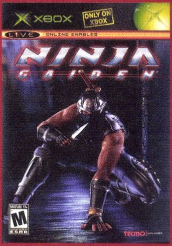
Ninja Gaiden made its not-so-grand debut as a fairly bland beat 'em up way back in 1988. It's mainly remembered for a horribly violent continue screen where Ryu is being held down as a spinning saw is slowly lowered into his chest. Smart move though—you'd feel so bad for poor Ryu you'd plunk down 50 cents just to spare him from another gruesome end. Despite being the genesis for all things *Gaiden,* this game's idea, scenario, and villain have never been revisited.



NINJA GAIDEN (NES)

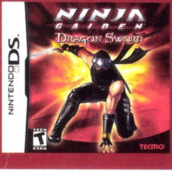
Until the Xbox remake, this was without a doubt the most famous entry in the franchise, popular enough to spawn two NES sequels, plus games on three handhelds, and a SNES compilation cartridge. As with *Gaiden Sigma,* the NES titles were ruthlessly difficult and forced you to replay entire levels if you used up all your lives. No saves, no passwords, just you and a game that was designed to hurt your feelings.

Most notably, *Gaiden* introduced cinematic cutscenes to the 8-bit era, using big, bright visuals to tell a story in a fresh, exciting way. While other games were struggling to present NES graphics at all, *Gaiden* looked years ahead of its time. Before long, just about every action game was using *Gaiden*-inspired cutscenes.



NINJA GAIDEN (XBOX)

After a nine year absence, Tecmo unearthed its key franchise with a huge marketing push (Ryu was effectively "back in black"), graphics that put everything else to shame, and a difficulty curve that has since become legendary. This one game revitalized the series, and later became 2007's *Ninja Gaiden Sigma* (which we awarded four stars), and kept the franchise's reputation for cutting-edge visuals and punishing difficulty alive for a new generation.



NINJA GAIDEN: DRAGON SWORD (DS)

After the Xbox remake and *Sigma* rejuvenated the franchise, Team Ninja turned its capable hands to the least likely platform for its newest *Gaiden* slasher. Held vertically like a book, *Dragon Sword* seemingly uses every last ounce of the DS's power to create an intense, combo-heavy action title that looks so good it could pass for a PSP game. And seeing as there's still no PSP equivalent, you'd do well to check it out.

Ryu will once again be tasked with saving the world from complete annihilation at the hands of a few malevolent Fiends.

significant ways. Though the first *Sigma* contained an intense amount of graphic violence—including plenty of blood and beheadings—*Ninja Gaiden II* out does it exponentially. Hell, its violence makes *Kill Bill* look like *Kung Fu Panda.* Enemies are constantly being dismembered, their limbs exploding in ghastly red clouds of flesh and viscera, their open wounds spraying fountains of blood that are almost as majestic as they are disturbing. Such will not be the case in *Sigma 2.*

"Violence is not going to be one of the key selling points of this title," says Hayashi. "We wondered if violence and gore and blood—all that was pushed to the forefront for *Ninja Gaiden 2*—is really what is going to drive this version of *Ninja Gaiden 2* to the top. We figured it's not all about the violence. It's not all about how bloody it is. We thought taking the project to a much cooler, cleaner, sleeker look would change the image [of the game] and adjust it so that everyone could see what was great about all the *Ninja Gaidens* that have been produced so far."

So enemies now emit what appears to be a purple essence that the developers argue will make the combat appear smoother and almost balletic. Dismemberment (and smaller, more realistic amounts of blood) is still in, however. "Even though we want to make this a sleeker game, we want to give players a sense of accomplishment. We're not going away from [violence], but there's so much more that we can sell about this title than just having a violent ninja game," explains Hayashi.

This decision could also have been inspired by actual gameplay concerns, since limbless baddies will still attempt to attack you despite massive blood loss. Good thing you'll have the new Obliteration Techniques at your disposal—dynamic finishing moves that let you finish off downed enemies with style.

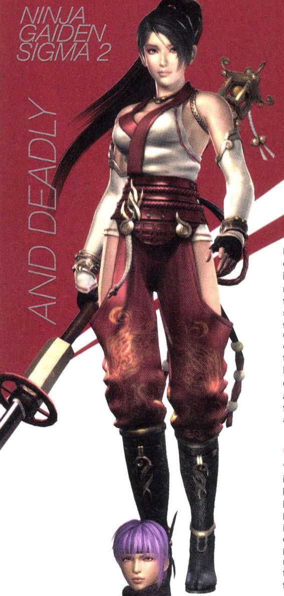
SIGMANIA

And of course, there's all that fresh, new content that only *Sigma 2* contains. The most sizable additions definitely have to be the two new characters: Ayane, a classic *Dead or Alive* character who served as Ryu's support system during the first *Sigma,* and Momiji, a young female ninja who first appeared as the damsel-in-distress in the DS game *Ninja Gaiden Dragon Sword* (see the Beautiful and Deadly sidebar for insights into how these characters will perform).

Both of these characters will bring with them entirely new story missions that will be inserted in between those of Ryu in much the same way that Rachel's missions were added to *Sigma.* So not only can you suddenly enjoy the added variety of having three playable characters in the story mode, the main campaign has actually been extended with new levels, new side-stories (complete with cutscenes, naturally), and new enemies that, according to the developers, will "create new gameplay scenarios." Plus, you'll almost certainly encounter a few new bosses—such as a living Statue of

BEAUTIFUL... AND DEADLY

Introducing new characters to a game is no small task. You must create move sets for them, balance their skills with the rest of the game, and make them as unique as possible while constantly managing fan expectations. Lead Designer Yosuke Hayashi describes how he's attempting to fit two new female ninjas—Momiji and Ayane—into Sigma 2.



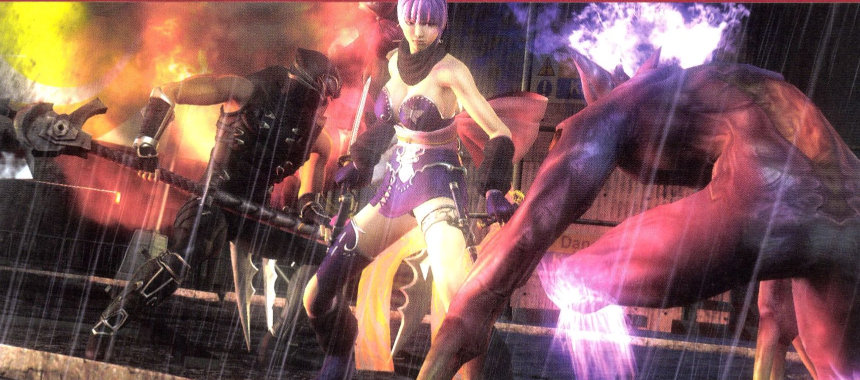
↖ MOMIJI

"The sword that she's carrying is a weapon that's only used by female characters: the longsword. So not being able to have Ryu take on the sword... it'd have to go to a female character by default. So it's a perfect match that Momiji would make a comeback of sorts in this game and we'd be able to show moves that are very unique to a female character. Hopefully, movements that you haven't really seen from female characters in other games, as well. She can't really do the quick moves—swinging a two-meter sword—but she can perform high double jumps and double flips, because of the longsword."

← AYANE

"We didn't want to make it unnatural that she's now carrying a weapon. So when you see her [dual short swords] at first glance, you know that there's something new, but it's not obvious in a negative way. It's subtle. It's a subtle weapon. She's not carrying this big-ass old thing where it's going to make her look like a completely different character. We had to make sure not to change her image in any way. Her moves are very similar in ways to how she's known in *Dead or Alive.* Obviously, with the new weapons and different environment that she's in, there have been changes. It wouldn't be exactly the same as you've seen it in *DOA,* but she still has the same sort of movement."

ECLIPSE SCYTHE
An ornate, oversized scythe that provides a mix of heavy attacks and quick combos. Completely and utterly badass.



Liberty or a "Giant Buddha" that nearly destroys Tokyo, Godzilla-style.

The other major addition to *Sigma 2* is the all-new co-op mode, which marks the first-ever legitimate multiplayer mode in a *Ninja Gaiden* game. Unfortunately, you won't be able to play through the story mode with a friend since this mode has been designed as a separate entity, but the developers did build it with replayability in mind. "We don't believe in having a solid story just for the co-op mode. What you're going to see is more of an arcade-style co-op mode. That's what we're aiming for. It doesn't necessarily have to follow a storyline, it's more the intense, action-packed, pure co-op mode that you would imagine," adds Hayashi.

And if you're wondering exactly how co-op will work, Hayashi explains that it won't simply be a single-player-plus-one affair. "Even though all the details haven't been finalized yet, [collaborative attacks] are something that we are going to make available in co-op. The word 'co-op' really needs to be visually displayed in terms of how that action plays out. That's important to us, to have something that you're going to be able to collaborate with your other partner, and to be a lot more aggressive in terms of attacking your enemies."

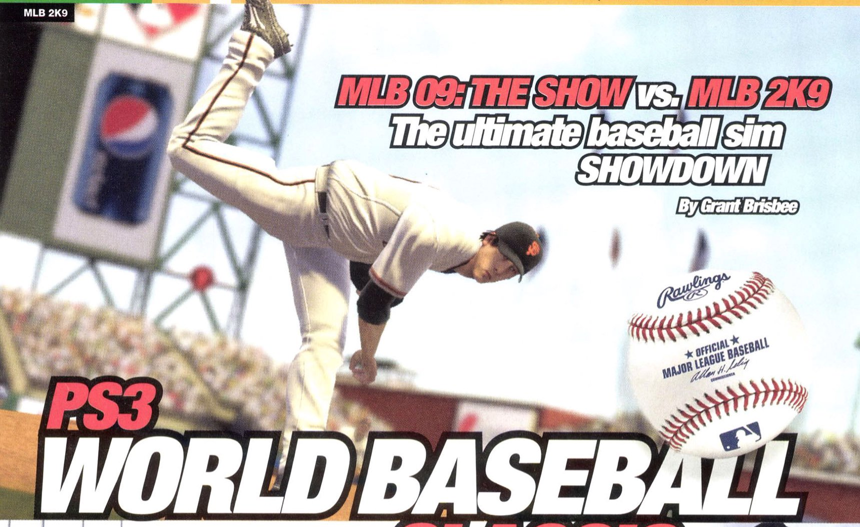
And that's just the big stuff. *Sigma 2* also contains a host of smaller tweaks and refinements: You can now move while firing the (considerably more badass) bow; Ryu will now turn and look in the direction you are supposed to travel with the press of a button; certain moves have been given more visual flair; and countless calculated changes to the fundamentals of the fighting system have been made.

A WISE MAN ONCE SAID…

Sleeker, cleaner, and more complete. With the addition of ninja co-op and a slightly more hassle-free health system, *Ninja Gaiden Sigma 2* should deliver a fun, universally appreciated fighting experience. As Hayashi-san is quick to point out, fun is a universal language. "We want to create games that have no language barrier," says Hayashi. "There are no borders in terms of how you appreciate and play and enjoy the game. So what comes first and foremost is not having to understand either the original language or localized language in order to feel the excitement and depth of the game. So this is a great example of a game that we feel, without really having to be able to understand the original language, you will still be able to fully enjoy." ■

MLB 09: The Show | PS3 | Price: $59.99 | ESRB: Everyone | Publisher: SCEA | Developer: SCEA San Diego

MLB 2K9 | PS3 | Price: $59.99 | ESRB: Everyone | Publisher: 2K Sports | Developer: Visual Concepts

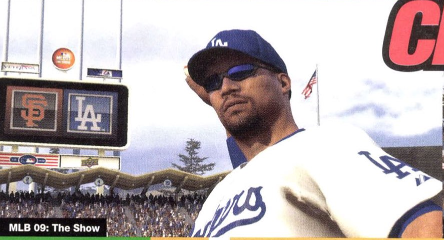

MLB 2K9

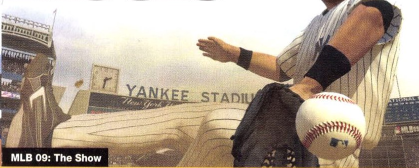
MLB 09: THE SHOW vs. MLB 2K9

The ultimate baseball sim SHOWDOWN

By Grant Brisbee

PS3 WORLD BASEBALL CLASSIC


MLB 09: The Show

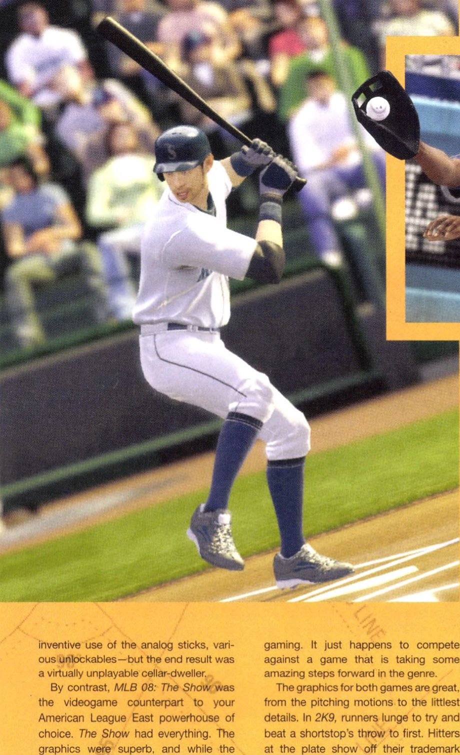

MLB 09: The Show

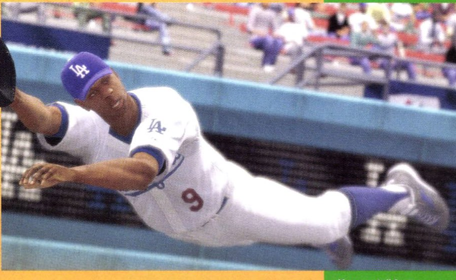
Devoted San Francisco Giants fans may recognize the name of our special guest reviewer. Grant is the chief blogger at McCovey Chronicles.com, where he imparts his vast baseball knowledge and incisive wit every single day.

There usually aren't a lot of surprises with game franchises. If you didn't like *OMG WWII FPS VII,* you probably aren't going to do cartwheels for *OMG WWII FPS VIII.* A flawed series usually has problems that can't be fixed with a subtle gameplay tweak or two.

With baseball games, though, that subtle gameplay tweak can make all the difference in the world. A control scheme that rendered a previous installment unplayable might be overhauled completely. The frustrating hitting mechanics of the previous year could give way to a natural, intuitive control scheme. The perennial optimism and "wait 'til next year" mentality of real-life baseball can also extend to baseball videogame franchises, just as the Tampa Bay Rays can go from 90 losses to a World Series berth in one year.

Major League Baseball 2K8 was the videogame equivalent of the 2007 Rays: a few very good players—Carl Crawford, Carlos Pena, and Scott Kazmir—on a pretty wretched team. It had some very good features—smooth fielding controls,





You can tell from the stance that's Ichiro in *2K9* even before seeing the facial features. But Juan Pierre laying out like that in the same game? That pushes our suspension of disbelief.

inventive use of the analog sticks, various unlockables—but the end result was a virtually unplayable cellar-dweller.

By contrast, *MLB 08: The Show* was the videogame counterpart to your American League East powerhouse of choice. *The Show* had everything. The graphics were superb, and while the franchise mode was deep and involving, the gameplay was good enough that one-off contests were just as enjoyable. And now we're ready for "next year." Anything can happen at "next year." And, indeed, last season the Rays knocked off the Yankees and Red Sox en route to an AL pennant. Is this the year that 2K Sports' baseball entry triumphs over *The Show?*

No.

This Is Baseball

Let's be clear, though: *Major League Baseball 2K9* isn't a total flop. The move to developer Visual Concepts has brought with it a more playable gameplay mechanic. It moves the *2K* franchise forward, and it's a credit to next-gen gaming. It just happens to compete against a game that is taking some amazing steps forward in the genre.

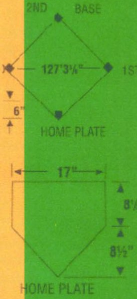
The graphics for both games are great, from the pitching motions to the littlest details. In *2K9,* runners lunge to try and beat a shortstop's throw to first. Hitters at the plate show off their trademark stances and bat waggles. Third basemen charge slow choppers and make off-balance throws, and the animations are generally smooth and lifelike. *The Show* opens each game with a panoramic shot of the home ballpark that's stunning enough to make Tropicana Field seem like a nice place to watch a game. Well, almost. The player animations of *The Show* are also impressively detailed, as the body language of hitters is eerily reminiscent of their real-life counterpart. From about 15 feet away, it's hard to tell the difference between either game or a live baseball telecast. *The Show* looks a little better overall, but just barely.

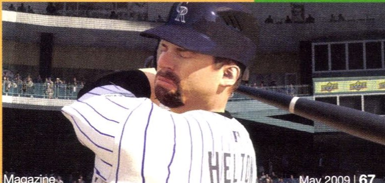
Season and franchise modes in both games are solid. Wannabe general managers have full control over minor league teams and prospects, and while the amateur draft function isn't quite as realistic as it could be, it's better than having random minor leaguers show up in your organization year after year. The addition of 40-man-rosters to *MLB 09: The Show* adds a hefty dose of realism, though it can be a pain to navigate several different menus just to sign a single free agent. The roster limitations also hamper trades with the computer, as in order to give another team two players off your 40-man roster, you have to take back two players. The menu options, statistical options, and functionality of *2K9* are just a bit more user-friendly.

Swing the Stick

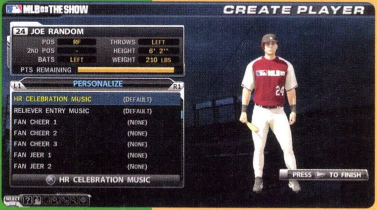
But there's a reason why companies aren't lining up to release games like *Menu Navigation '09*. While it might drive you nuts to have to scroll past every position player with a 0.00 ERA to get to your team's actual ERA leaders (as you have to do in *The Show*), you can live with those flaws if the gameplay is good enough. And gameplay is what puts *The Show* in a different echelon of baseball games.

At first, *The Show* would seem to be at a disadvantage, as the *2K9* format uses the analog sticks in unique and user-friendly ways. For *2K9,* you have to swivel the analog controls with the right timing and motion to snap off the pitch you want, and the hitting controls feel similarly intuitive (it's been streamlined to





What's the Rockies' Todd Helton telling pitchers in *The Show?* That he can take mighty cuts at their best stuff with his eyes closed? Maybe three years ago.



CREATE PLAYER

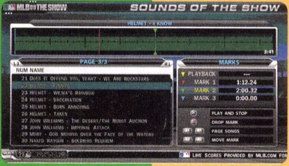
24 JOE RANDOM

POS RF
2ND POS -
BATS LEFT
THROWS LEFT
HEIGHT 6' 2''
WEIGHT 210 LBS
PTS REMAINING

PERSONALIZE

HR CELEBRATION MUSIC	(DEFAULT)
RELIEVER ENTRY MUSIC	(DEFAULT)
FAN CHEER 1	(NONE)
FAN CHEER 2	(NONE)
FAN CHEER 3	(NONE)
FAN JEER 1	(NONE)
FAN JEER 2	(NONE)

HR CELEBRATION MUSIC



SOUNDS OF THE SHOW

HELMET - I KNOW

3:41

PAGE 3/3

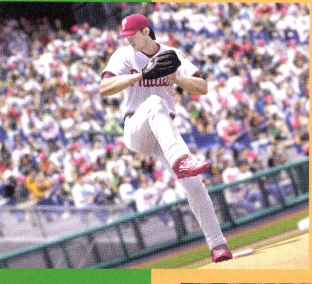
NUM NAME
21 DOES IT OFFEND YOU, YEAH? - WE ARE ROCKSTARS
22 HELMET - I KNOW
23 HELMET - WILMA'S RAINBOW
24 HELMET - VACCINATION
25 HELMET - BORN ANNOYING
26 HELMET - TAKEN
27 JOHN WILLIAMS - THE DESERT/THE ROBOT AUCTION
28 JOHN WILLIAMS - IMPERIAL ATTACK
29 MOBY - GOD MOVING OVER THE FACE OF THE WATERS
30 NAKED RAYGUN - SOLDIERS REQUIEM

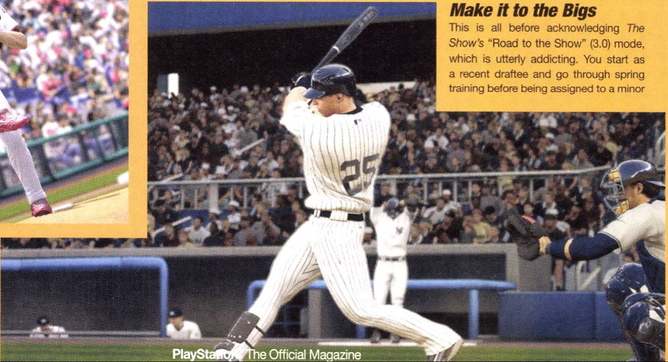
MARKS

PLAYBACK	---
MARK 1	1:12.24
MARK 2	2:00.32
MARK 3	0:00.00

PLAY AND STOP
DROP MARK
PAGE SONGS
MOVE MARK

At first, cheers and adulation from fans might feel a tad tacky. But as soon as you record your own crowd appreciation missives, and save it as a Sound of the Show, you'll realize videogame baseball will never be the same again.





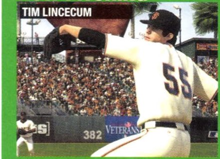
At the critical point of release or impact, it's tough to distinguish between *2K9* (above) and *The Show* (right).

a two-move method from the unwieldy three-step approach last year, and now it really works). *The Show* doesn't try to reinvent anything, as both the pitching and hitting are controlled with well-timed taps of the X button, a control scheme that's been around since before the first PlayStation.

When you miss with a pitch in *2K9,* though, look out. Diminutive David Eckstein will pump a 450-foot homer off your closer if your thumb slips. And once you have the analog timing down in *2K9,* your pitchers all become latter-day Greg Madduxes, painting the corners with ease. It's common to get through five innings in *2K9* after only throwing 30 pitches, 27 of which go for strikes. But if you try and nip the outside corner with Barry Zito in *The Show,* and you time the pitching meter perfectly, your pitch still might end up well outside of the zone. Why? Because you're *Barry Freaking Zito.* There shouldn't be any advantages to playing Zito in the videogame world. These little touches of realism make a substantial difference. With *The Show,* it's actually possible for the computer to have a 12-pitch at-bat against you, with a hitter like Rafael Furcal fouling off pitches both in and out of the zone. If you've played baseball games for a while, you know why that's exciting. It's *real*. It's the kind of thing that drives pitchers crazy and runs up pitch counts. It affects strategies in both dugouts. And it's something that hadn't previously been a part of baseball gaming.

The hitting controls of *2K9* are an improvement over last year's, and the back-and-forth motion of the analog stick is natural and comfortable. In the end, though, the controls are way too forgiving, as swinging and missing is hard to do unless you set out to do so intentionally. Correctly guessing a pitch and timing it decently almost always leads to an extra-base hit. By contrast, it's possible in *The Show* to time a swing perfectly, guess the correct pitch and location, and still only come away with a foul ball for your efforts. And while that might seem like a negative to some, it's one of the reasons why *The Show* is an amazing baseball game. The real-life difference between Albert Pujols fouling a pitch directly back to the screen and Pujols hitting a home run to dead center might be a quarter of an inch. The Show feels like an extension of this "game of inches" realism. Sometimes your mighty cut ends with a pop-up; sometimes your feeble poke ends with a double down the line. Guessing a pitch or location doesn't guarantee anything, and it makes successful at-bats more rewarding. And, just as significantly, it's actually possible to take a walk off a computer pitcher. A patient, measured approach actually pays off, which just might be a milestone of videogame baseball.

NOW PITCHING



MLB 09: The Show

MLB 2K9

Make it to the Bigs

This is all before acknowledging *The Show's* "Road to the Show" (3.0) mode, which is utterly addicting. You start as a recent draftee and go through spring training before being assigned to a minor

Reviews

Scores | Analysis | Buying Advice

RATINGS

★★★★★ **LEGENDARY**
A game so amazing, the entire PTOM staff recommends it. A must buy!

★★★★½ **SUPERB**
Not quite a timeless classic, but one of the finest of its breed.

★★★★ **GREAT!**
A finely crafted, thoroughly enjoyable experience. Worth your time and money.

★★★½ **SOLID**
A strong game. We noticed some flaws, but there's more to like than loathe.

★★★ **ENJOYABLE**
If the topic/license/style is your thing, there's enough to keep you entertained.

★★½ **MEDIOCRE**
An equal blend of sweet and sour. Discerning gamers can find better.

★★ **SCARRED**
A smattering of entertainment hidden amongst an abundance of flaws.

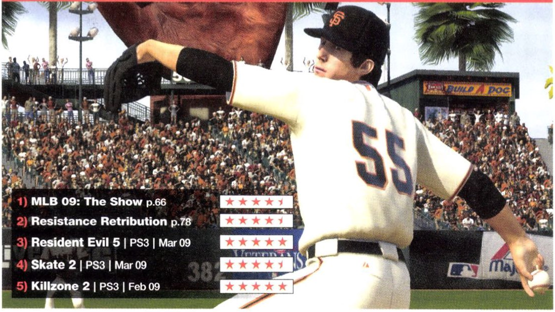
★½ **FRUSTRATING**
"Argh!" will be the self-created soundtrack of this game. No thank you.

★ **PAINFUL**
We played it so you don't have to. Now you owe us cookies.

½ **BROKEN**
Hey, it comes in a free plastic box! Wee!

Win junk from Rob's desk! We'll select one winner from emails that correctly identify the three photos from our Rating scale and explain how they're related. Send your answers with the subject line "May Ratings" to PTOM Letters@futureus.com.

Hot 5 List Top Picks from Recent Issues



1) **MLB 09: The Show** p.66 ★★★★½
2) **Resistance Retribution** p.78 ★★★★½
3) **Resident Evil 5** | PS3 | Mar 09 ★★★★★
4) **Skate 2** | PS3 | Mar 09 ★★★★½
5) **Killzone 2** | PS3 | Feb 09 ★★★★★

Meet the experts delivering your buying advice

Matt Hazard has the PTOM crew thinking: What retro game would we like to see resurrected?

ROB SMITH
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Quazatron (from the ZX Spectrum), aka *Paradroid* on the Commodore 64. A low-end robot battles bigger robots in "circuit diagram" showdowns and loots the vanquished bot's parts. *Machine Hunter* (on PSone) was supposed to be a reworking of the idea, but when Rob asked about the lynch-pin circuit clash element, he was told "oh, we left that part out." It still makes him short circuit.

NOW PLAYING: *Eat Lead, Resistance Retribution, MLB 09: The Show, FIFA 09*

TERESA DUN
ASSISTANT EDITOR

Do the '90s count as retro? If so, Teresa'd love to see a remake of *The Secret of Monkey Island!*—preferably on the PSP...with Trophy support. In fact, she'd like the whole collection of LucasArts' old school adventure games. And as always, she dreams of remakes of the rest of the *Final Fantasy* games for PSP (or PS3)! Specifically, *VI* and *VII!* Come on, get to it! Pretty please?

NOW PLAYING: *Call of Duty 4, Patapon 2, Soulcalibur IV, LocoRoco 2*

KEN BOUSQUET
ART DIRECTOR

Ken was a little befuddled when presented with the retro gaming question. "What do you mean remake a retro game? There's a new *FIFA* every year. I don't understand your question." No, Ken, not *FIFA*. What other game from yesteryear would you like to see remade? "Other game? What other games? Why would there be a need for other games?" Umm... "Go away. Your wasting my time!" Sorry, Ken.

NOW PLAYING: *FIFA Soccer 09*

CARLOS RUIZ
INTERN

Carlos wonders whether it's two words or one, but: *Battletoads!* The original game was so ridiculously goofy and action-packed that Carlos is sure it'd be a hit! Unless the world still isn't ready for Zitz, Rash, and Pimple. But with names like those, just think of the potential in-game advertising opportunities! The Ninja Turtles got nothing on da toads.

NOW PLAYING: *Eat Lead, Savage Moon, Crash Commando*

ROGER BURCHILL
MANAGING EDITOR

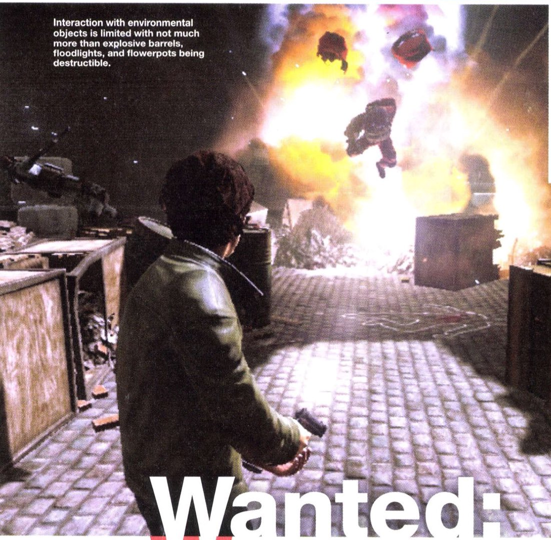
A life-long gamer, Roger's played a *ton* of retro games. But for some reason, he never owned, or knew anyone who owned an Intellivision system. As such, he never had the opportunity to play *B-17 Bomber*—and like a festering puss-filled boil, it still plagues his soul to this day. Somebody, please, free Roger from his torment!

NOW PLAYING: *Wanted: Weapons of Fate, Tom Clancy's HAWX, Noby Noby Boy*

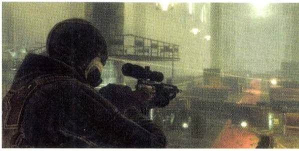
SCOTT BUTTERWORTH
ASSISTANT EDITOR

For no particular reason, the retro game that popped into Scott's head when we started discussing remakes was *Road Rash* on the Genesis. Really, what's not to love about racing motorcycles cross-country while bludgeoning other riders every chance you get? But then Scott realized that a next-gen *Road Rash* is really just a stripped down *GTA IV*. Score!

NOW PLAYING: *Watchmen, Street Fighter IV, Ninja Gaiden Sigma 2* (Beat that!), *Killzone 2*



Interaction with environmental objects is limited with not much more than explosive barrels, floodlights, and flowerpots being destructible.



The sniper sequences look enticing, but aren't all that thrilling because you're rigidly fixed to a static location.

PS3 | **R**

Wanted: Weapons of Fate

Loom for improvement

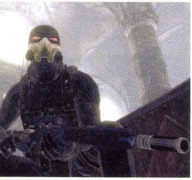
PS3 PRICE: $59.99 ESRB: Mature PUBLISHER: Warner Brothers Int. Ent. DEVELOPER: GRIN Barcelona/Universal Pictures Digital Platforms Group

Angelina Jolie is *not* in *Wanted: Weapons of Fate.* I know, the news is as piercing as the bullet that vaporized her brain in the *Wanted* movie. Oh. Sorry about the spoiler, if you haven't seen the film.

The reason for Fox's absence (Jolie's character) is that the events in the game are an immediate continuation of the motion picture storyline. Whereas the movie focused on Wesley Gibson's bewildering baptism as an assassin and his search for the truth about his father, the game follows his quest to discover the identity and fate of his mother. But while Wesley's interactions with the secret society of assassins known as The Fraternity and their mysterious Loom of Fate are intriguing, let's be honest: storyline takes a back seat to over-the-top action sequences in this stunt effects vehicle.

While *Weapons of Fate* shows some comparative restraint in its depiction of the film's signature violence (no exact recreations of *Wanted* director Timur Bekmambetov's affinity for detailing a bullet's interaction with human head), gore whores will find plenty to revel in here as blood spray is liberal and special kills receive memorable follow-the-bullet-path cutscenes. Alongside the M-rated dialogue you've got a game that will delight gamers and outrage parents, and does an admirable job of recreating the visual style and atmosphere of the cinematic source material.

The stylish flair is also well translated to the core play mechanics thanks to the effective cover system, elegant bullet-curving, and satisfying slow-mo Assassin Time. Entering a room filled with rival assassins, jumping over obstacles and taking cover, picking away at the enemy until initiating an adrenaline-fueled Assassin Time sequence to off multiple targets, and surgically eliminating your most capable adversary with a curved kill shot is when *Weapons of Fate* really shines. In and of themselves, each



Did the Helghast invade France?!

element isn't particularly extraordinary (although special props to the bullet-curving system for being simple and seamless, yet still satisfying), but in combination they create a smooth, compelling flow of murderous mayhem.

But while these engrossing sequences are the highlight of the game, they are also the stylistic crutch that disguise and prop up the lack of gameplay substance. The first hour of *Weapons of Fate* feels like you're playing something special, but it soon becomes familiar and repetitive. The levels may appear elaborate and expansive, but you're kept on a singular track. While you'll have no problem hopping over a bench in a combat zone, you'll have no such luck with a crate (or other random debris) blocking any doorway, stairs, alley, etc., that might lead you away from the fray.

Despite changes in scenery, this devotion to a railed progression means you move from one room set-piece to another, with little variation on how you're going to dispatch enemies camping in the next section. The limited weapons arsenal (handgun and dual-wielded machine pistols only) may be accurate with the source material but it hampers the play diversity. Occasional events provide a sniper rifle or let you man a machine-gun emplacement, but the fixed location and limited field-of-view impart the unsophisticated feel of an old-school shooting gallery game. And why can enemies throw grenades, but you can't?

The three Guardians (mini-bosses) you encounter are more powerful than standard issue assassins, but the key to defeating them is ridiculously pattern-based. Die once or twice to determine the pattern and you'll have no problem taking them down. You'd hope that the protracted showdown with The Immortal (final boss) would be more involving, but you'd be wrong as his apparent strategy is to outlive you (literally), not outsmart you.

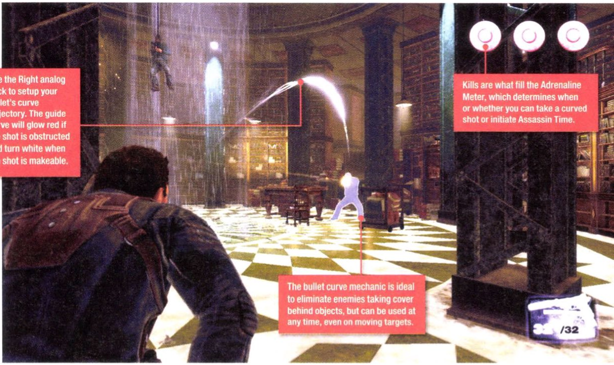
But *Weapons of Fate* ultimately misses more than it hits because it has so *little* game. Any respectable wannabe assassin is going to blow through the game in well under 10 hours. The unlockable Killer difficulty mode may entice you to reload once, but if you check the magazine for additional replay rounds that's your lot; no multiplayer component here, *Wanted* lives and dies with its single-player experience.

Reflecting on the experiences of the *Wanted* movie and game, it's amazing how similar they are. Both are entertaining style-over-substance affairs that appeal to our baser instincts. You'll have fun if you focus on the mindless carnage, but in the end you'll discover that the ambiguous storyline didn't really answer anything. Somehow, it's easier to forgive the movie for that bit of subterfuge. But then, the movie only cost 10 bucks or so—and it had Angelina Jolie.

Roger Burchill

★★★½

Dangerous Curves



Use the Right analog stick to setup your bullet's curve trajectory. The guide curve will glow red if the shot is obstructed and turn white when the shot is makeable.

Kills are what fill the Adrenaline Meter, which determines when or whether you can take a curved shot or initiate Assassin Time.

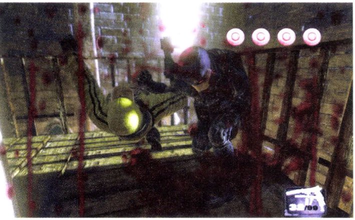
The bullet curve mechanic is ideal to eliminate enemies taking cover behind objects, but can be used at any time, even on moving targets.

Killer Movie

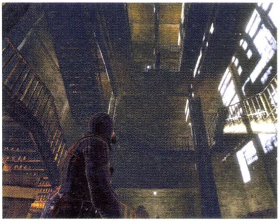
In his review of the film [PTOM, Feb. '09 issue], columnist Jason D'Aprile said, "Wanted is all style over substance," but that the movie is, "...a remarkable, gleefully entertaining bout of brainless fun."

The PTOM staff concurs with Jason's four-star rating of the film and believes that watching it should be a prerequisite to playing *Weapons of Fate*, which expands upon the story and characters introduced in the movie. It's the best way to familiarize yourself with Wesley Gibson and his sudden and unexpected indoctrination into the secret society of assassins known as the Fraternity of Weavers.

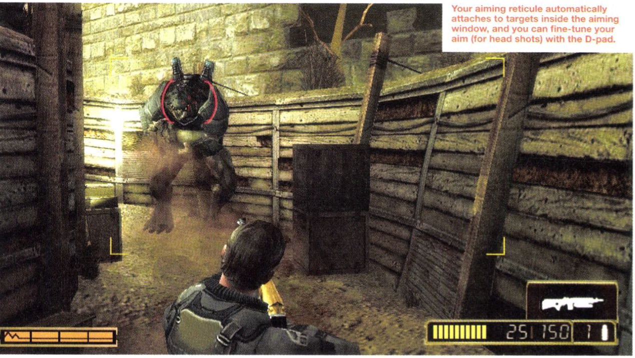
Besides, what better way to enjoy the hi-def capabilities of your Blu-ray player than to closely, slowly, and repeatedly scrutinize Angelina Jolie's...er, *compelling* performance as über-assassin, Fox.



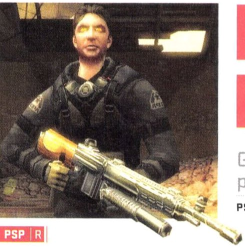
It's often more convenient to rush an enemy and initiate a savage, bloody melee attack rather than trying to setup a precise kill shot.



Sure, it looks cool, but the net effect is: run up stairs, curve bullet, run up stairs... Repeat ad nauseam.



Your aiming reticule automatically attaches to targets inside the aiming window, and you can fine-tune your aim (for head shots) with the D-pad.



Resistance Retribution

Gnarled hands are the price you pay for powering through the PSP's finest shooter

PSP PRICE: $39.99 ESRB: Mature PUBLISHER: SCEA DEVELOPER: Bend Studio

PSP | **R**

Punishing is too light a term to describe *Resistance Retribution.* Grueling and harsh in places are far more appropriate as you fight the controls as well as the incessant, varied, and challenging enemies packed into this top-class PSP shooter. The oft-maligned missing analog stick forces you to use the face buttons to turn towards targets, and it's awkward in fast-paced first- or third-person shooters. *Retribution* is definitely fast-paced, its third-person view is imperative for effective use of the cover system, and its relentless set pieces ensure you'll be tensed, clenched, but ultimately thrilled by the experience.

Fitting neatly in the intervening years between the end of the original *Resistance* and its recent sequel, you'll take hard-nosed ex-con James Grayson alongside the Maquis resistance across mainland Europe. His one-man wrecking crew of Chimera conversion centers (while technically AWOL) landed him behind bars and facing a firing squad. His retribution will be sweet, but desperately difficult, increasingly so as save checkpoints are applied less liberally as the game wears on.

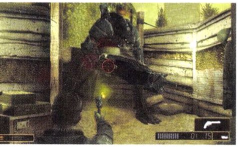
Survival requires timing and precision, using cover behind doors and walls, and popping out for opportune pot-shots. The mix of Chimeran hybrids, drones, titans, scuttling leapers, and exploding boilers require regular weapon switches and the use of every piece of ammo you can scavenge. *Resistance* vets will recognize many weapons—the Auger, the FarEye, the LAARK—and use these and a couple new additions against those familiar enemies, plus the new hag and cloven.

The aim assist and auto-centering does as effective a job as possible at overcoming the clear control shortcomings. Finding health packs is crucial to survival, and you can also snag intel documents to fill in the background story. All these pieces contribute to a single-player campaign that's oddly more compelling than the one in *Resistance 2.* Still, owners of *R2* can also plug their PSP to the PS3 and change the way the game is played, with a regenerating health system and more intel; you can even use the PS3 gamepad (an instant control fix).

That's icing on a very full cake of PSP action. Sure, after a marathon session you may need to soak your hands, but you'll have been satisfied (or frustrated) by an intensely challenging *Resistance* experience that's certifiably the best PSP shooter available.

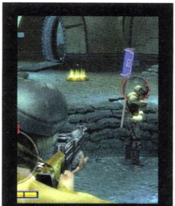
Rob Smith

★★★★½



You don't, in general, want to bring a pea-shooter to a big gun party.

The secondary function chaingun shield protects against most projectiles.

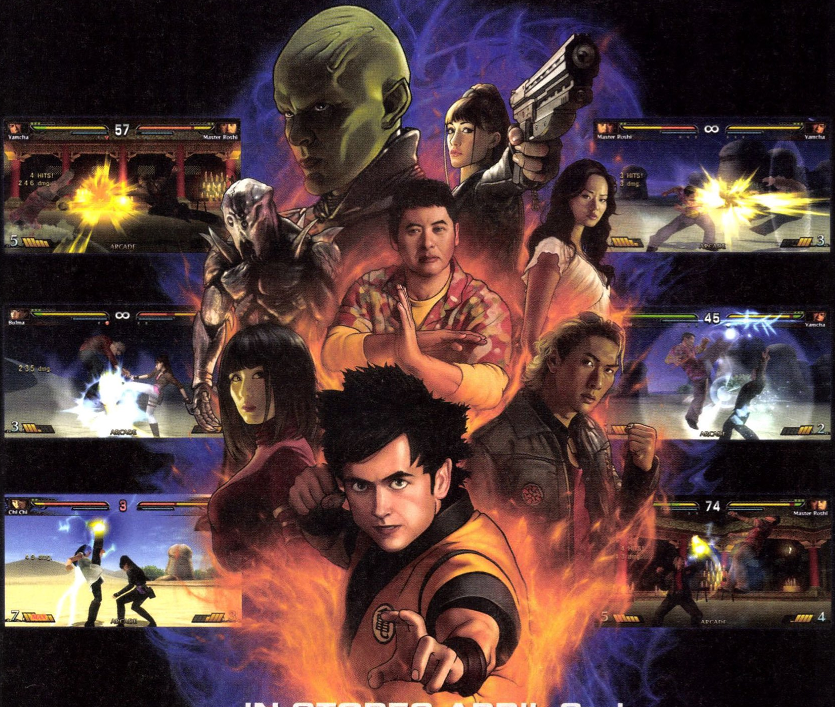


Shoot A Friend

Online multiplayer *Resistance Retribution* is extremely robust (though naturally less exhaustive than the big brother PS3 version's spectacular suite of options). Five different game maps are used for five different modes. Familiar Free For All, Team Deathmatch, and CTF are joined by Containment, and our favorite, Assimilation (where one player is the Chimera and must kill the resistance fighters who then respawn as more Chimera.) Game setup is a breeze, the controls hobble everyone, and you can score points for assists as well as kills (or captures). Surprisingly well-paced and fun.

Fratricide: A cinematic opening sees James Grayson execute his own brother, Johnny, in a Chimeran conversion center. Gnarly!

The fate of the world is in your hands on PSP® (PlayStation®Portable) system


Yamcha
57
Master Roshi
4 HITS!
246 dmg.
ARCADE
Master Roshi
∞
Yamcha
3 HITS!
3 dmg.
ARCADE
Bulma
∞
235 dmg.
ARCADE
45
Yamcha
ARCADE
Chi Chi
3
ARCADE
74
Master Roshi
ARCADE

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TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Mild Suggestive Themes
Violence

PlayStation®Portable

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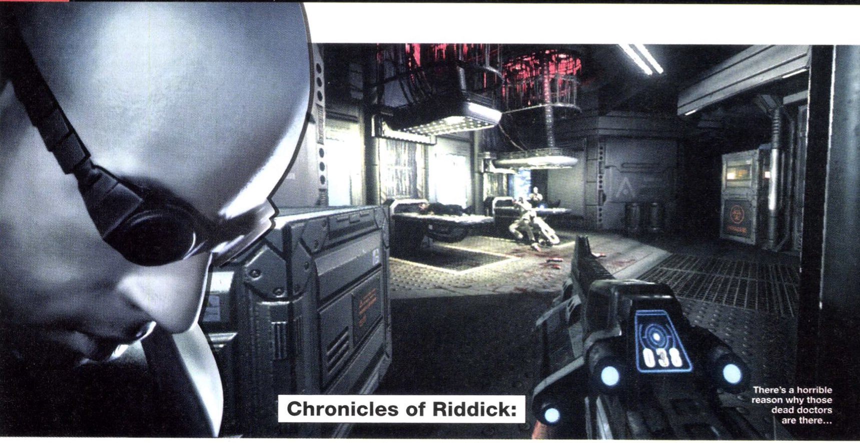


There's a horrible reason why those dead doctors are there...

Chronicles of Riddick: Assault on Dark Athena

"The dark...is afraid of me..." – *Riddick the Badass*

PS3 PRICE: $59.99 ESRB: Mature PUBLISHER: Atari DEVELOPER: Starbreeze

Shades protecting his light-sensitive eyes are the only accessory Riddick needs to get by. No nerdy gizmos or gadgets required here, his bare hands are more than enough. In *Chronicles of Riddick: Assault on Dark Athena* (a remake of the 2004 Xbox game, *Escape from Butcher Bay,* with an added *Dark Athena* campaign), simplicity is king. Save for the very start of the game, you rely on your bare fists and a few melee weapons to fight through *Dark Athena.* And there's no stealth meter in this first-person action title, you just guide Riddick to a shaded spot, observe the patterns of the guard drones, and patiently wait for the right moment to snap necks. Crucially, the lighting is spot on. Shadows are realistic and you know you're invisible in them when the screen tints blue.

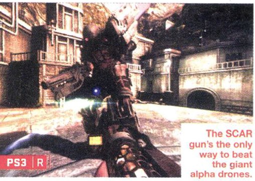
For twitchy trigger fingers, one cool addition is using felled drones as temporary gun emplacements. Fire their weapons, still clenched in their dead hands, until the ammo runs out. (It's twitchy, but hey, the gun's being clutched by a corpse!) Later on, a small but mightily effective armory becomes available. It includes an SMG (which fires 60 rounds at a blistering rate), the workhorse assault rifle, a shotgun, and a pistol. Along with the many weapons, there are mech suits, drones, and even the mighty alpha drone for you to periodically commandeer. Fun, but it's a formula familiar to anyone who's spent any time with a modern FPS.

My complaints center on the loading screens and the checkpoint system, which can trap you in those situations where you have one block of health left...and are dropped straight into a boss encounter. The system also invokes a trial and error element to play, thanks to the frequency of autosaving. If you don't know what's around the corner, you can blindly run in, die without penalty, and repeat until you nail it.

The chassis of *Dark Athena* is five years old and it makes for a safe and at times, predictable experience. Still, factor in the multiplayer and the phenomenal supporting cast (the crew of degenerates, unfortunates, and reprobates make the atmosphere of the game enjoyable, a throwback to some of the better sci-fi titles of the last decade), and *Dark Athena* becomes a well-rounded, albeit somewhat conventional, package.

Simon Bramble

★★★★



The SCAR gun's the only way to beat the giant alpha drones.

Forget night vision goggles, boxes are the best stealth tool.

Fast, Furyan Multiplayer

Alongside the usual Capture The Flag and Deathmatch multiplayer options are two great modes: Pitch Black and Butcher Bay Riot. Pitch Black wins out—it's a six-player game that has five playing as Mercs, with only weapon-mounted flashlights to see by, hunting down Riddick who can see in the dark. The tension here is brilliantly thick, and there's a balancing act in choosing weapons—the more powerful the weapon, the weaker the torch. Butcher Bay Riot splits you into teams of Mercs, prison guards, and prisoners, battling over an all-important power cell. Teamwork is key.

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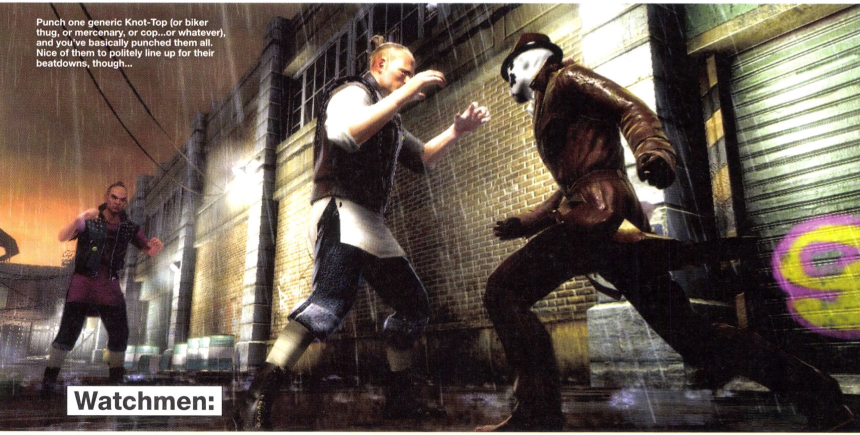


Punch one generic Knot-Top (or biker thug, or mercenary, or cop...or whatever), and you've basically punched them all. Nice of them to politely line up for their beatdowns, though...

Watchmen: The End is Nigh

The real reason for the Keene Act

PSN PRICE: $19.99 ESRB: Mature PUBLISHER: Warner Bros. Int. Ent. DEVELOPER: Deadline Games

PSN | R

As a devout (read: pretentious) *Watchmen* fanboy, my first thought upon learning about *Watchmen: The End is Nigh* was, of course, "Oh no." I mean, how could anyone possibly translate the subtle, layered genius of the graphic novel into a straight-up, old-school brawler? But much to my surprise and relief, the game's story is not only respectful of the source material but actually fits with Alan Moore's superb original.

The plot—which follows masked vigilantes Rorschach and Nite Owl as they pursue an escaped convict in the early 1970s—is only about as deep as the text you'd find on the back of a cereal box, but the dialogue is well written and distinctly in-character, and the story as a whole is intriguing enough to keep you involved...even though it never really goes anywhere. Plus, the superb art direction—overseen by original artist Dave Gibbons—greatly enhances the comic-book-style cutscenes.

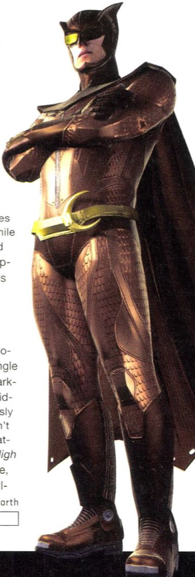
Unfortunately, the plus-level presentation can't hide gameplay that is flat-out boring. You'll spend six missions and five hours following an oppressively linear path, beating up wave after wave of generic, like-minded thugs, and—every once in a while—pressing buttons or pulling levers to open doors. Absolutely nothing unique or interesting happens to break the repetition.

This would be fine if the combat was consistently brilliant, but it never really leaps beyond decent. The generic two-button attack system—combined with throws, counters, and specials—offers a fair amount of depth and satisfaction (and ease of access), but the lack of variety in enemies encourages you to just find a pattern and repeat it over and over again. Or you can buttonmash. That works too.

The fact that you can play as either Rorschach or Nite Owl should, in theory, add some of that much needed variety, but in truth, the differences between them really don't change the way you play the game. Nite Owl has better defenses and two electrical area-attacks while Rorschach fights aggressively and is able to temporarily acquire weapons, but you'll find that your tactics really don't change. And while I appreciate the inclusion of splitscreen co-op, the lack of an online option is just criminal.

In short, the game nails the atmosphere but fails to implement a single original idea, and in being so remarkably unambitious, it becomes decidedly mediocre. If you're a hopelessly devoted *Watchmen* fan that doesn't mind decent-but-monotonous beat-'em-ups, *Watchmen: The End is Nigh* should suit you just fine. Otherwise, wait to see if a likely second installment is any better. Scott Butterworth

★★★



Tom Clancy's HAWX

A pretty bird with clipped wings

PS3 PRICE: **$59.99** ESRB: **Teen** PUBLISHER: **Ubisoft** DEVELOPER: **Ubisoft Bucharest**

There comes a time when technology stops helping and starts taking too much control, as if we can't be trusted to act on our own. So it is with *Tom Clancy's HAWX*, a classic-style aerial combat game that utilizes technology to handle, well, everything. The Enhanced Reality System (ERS) suggests the target, highlighted with a helpful yellow box, and the flight path to evade missiles or intercept an enemy.

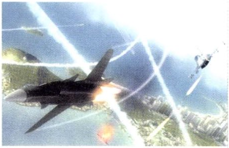
The "accessible controls" are just that: gloriously basic, and even more arcadey than *Ace Combat*. L2 and R2 brake and accelerate; the Left analog stick rolls left and right, while X fires lock-on missiles as soon as the enemy's in range. Suggested routes for evading enemy fighters in a dogfight can be activated with Square as soon as a message appears. The simplicity is initially refreshing, but the luster soon wears thin when you realize you're just moving from one target to another, waiting for a lock-on, and pressing fire.

A couple of hours into the game you'll encounter the "no assists" OFF control mode. A nice idea, it gives you the option to toggle to a long-distance view of your aircraft (by tapping L2 or R2 twice) in order to pull off flashier aerial maneuvers at the risk of stalls. But while the camera angle is more cinematic, the perspective is disorienting and divorces you further from a realistic dogfight experience.

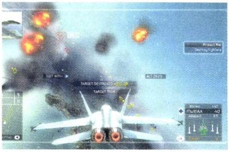
HAWX is a handsome looking game and if you enjoy ogling military hardware and don't mind a shooting gallery approach to your air combat, you'll have a top-gun time—especially in online multiplayer sessions. However, those seeking the depth and realistic edge usually associated with *Clancy* games will find that *HAWX* never really takes flight.

Tom Sykes

★★★½



The ERS is handy for taking down enemies, but you don't feel you earned the kill.



With hundreds of missiles at your disposal, realism isn't standard armament in HAWX.

8-BIT HEROES
PLAYER 1
GAME OVER
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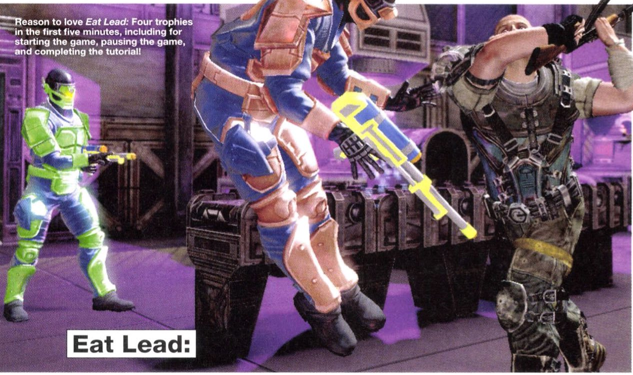
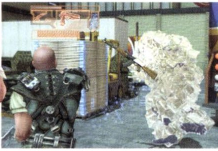
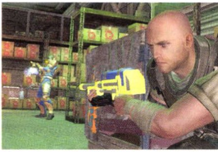


Reason to love *Eat Lead:* Four trophies in the first five minutes, including for starting the game, pausing the game, and completing the tutorial!



Matt does have a few super power-up abilities, earned by shooting stuff, but their use is clumsy in the wrong ways.

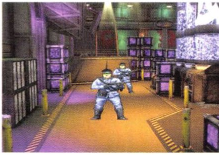


Reason to hate *Eat Lead:* Cover is cover until the game decides it isn't. But fun times with super-soakers!

Eat Lead: The Return of Matt Hazard

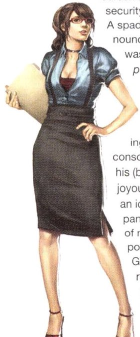
Out of "retirement" and into obscurity...

PS3 PRICE: $59.99 ESRB: Teen PUBLISHER: D3Publisher DEVELOPER: Vicious Cycle



Whether it's an odd plumber or 2D cut-out enemies, the game throws in the kitchen sink of character clichés.

PS3 | R



Our ethics insist that, come review time, we treat each of our gaming wards equally. All bets are off, all relationships forgotten; we ensconce ourselves in the cast-iron security of impartiality. A spade? We duly pronounce it a spade. But I was desperate…*desperate*…to love *Eat Lead: The Return of Matt Hazard*. A forgotten video-game hero returning to the modern console way, building on his (brilliantly conceived, joyously fake) legacy as an icon of the shooter pantheon was a stroke of marketing and positioning genius. Give that man a raise. Then kick him in the arse for not fighting harder to give this sensational premise the necessary time to elevate it to the gameplay quality it deserves.

20-plus years of (fake) history don't count for squat if your here-and-now shooter trots through as many rote sequences and environments as you can reasonably cram into an abbreviated development cycle. See what I'm doing already? I'm apologizing for the formulaic game design by assuming it crashed through the release door at the pink-slip-wielding behest of a corporate boss monster. It's not like it's running from the script. The retro themes, the self-awareness, the blatant nods to the game foibles of yore resonate with each conflab between Matt and The Genius, his holographic hottie. Matt's often funny, occasionally lame, and so self-referential that it's easy to get confused between genuine jokes and those that might be failed attempts at parody…or is that the joke itself?

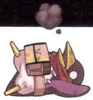
His world, where cover points pop into existence in a *Matrix*-like (but blue) fizzle™ but are dissipated into nothingness after a few hits, is classic shooter nonsense. Cowboys. Why? Because. Rockets ripped straight from *Weird Science's* experiment-gone-wrong? Okay, we're reliving the '80s…in '09. And as each scene shimmers from Matt's perception it remains unclear just who he is, where he is, what the hell is happening, and why you should care.

Caring involves shooting bad guys. Or beating them to death with melee attacks (that I found infinitely more effective than using the twitchy aiming controls). Dual-wield pistols are fine, as are shotguns, a magnum, but when your targeting reticule twitches past the head of a target you'll be more frustrated than enlightened. Boss monsters can invoke quick-time button-press events that require careful attention to get right, though some involve you shooting them or objects around their person to trigger the next cutscene.

The excuse for *Eat Lead* is that a year from now, this game design would be absolutely frickin' brilliant. If only they had time to take advantage of every FPS joke the game itself spotlights. Or if the office notice boards you can read infused the same comedic quality into the world that the dialogue between Will Arnett and Neil Patrick Harris managed (I question how much was written, and how much ad-lib made the final cut). But it all goes to wishing that *Eat Lead* were so much a better shooter than it actually is. It's more frustrating than funny. It's more inspired idea than effective execution. It's more early 1990s than 2009, and it shows.

Rob Smith

★★★



Prinny: Can I Really Be the Hero?

Dood, I'd rather get carpet burn

PSP PRICE: $39.99 ESRB: Teen PUBLISHER: NIS America
DEVELOPER: Nippon Ichi Software

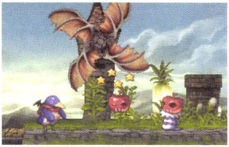
Here's a litmus test to determine whether you'll enjoy *Prinny: Can I Really Be the Hero?* Lie on the floor, take a penny, toss it high into the air, and try to catch it in your ear, with the other ear touching the carpet the whole time. Painful and limited, right? But add in some admittedly delightful music, dialogue, and cutscenes alongside colorful Japanese-style graphics, and you've pretty much got a real-life simulation of the *Prinny* game.

The problem is, the *Prinny* game is a platformer, and the jump mechanic is frustratingly finicky. At times, you can change directions mid-air; at other times, you can't! It's based on whether you were standing or running or already mid-jump when you attempted the leap, but it's a sloppy mechanic. In the face of waves of enemies, that unreliability kills the otherwise fun *Disgaea* atmosphere. Plus, it's designed to be difficult, masochistically so. Story-time: it took me two hours to get past a 30-second segment, and then I went to cry in a corner after giving my favorite stuffed Cactuar a black eye.

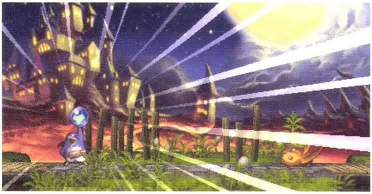
The point of the game is to wade through 10 main levels (which differ graphically and in difficulty according to the six different times of day, essentially creating 60 main levels) on a quest for Etna's "Ultimate Dessert," and the framework is lovely. It's just...the level design demands such absolute platforming and enemy-slashing perfection that it's painful. Like getting carpet burn on your ear. Whether it's worth it depends on your pain threshold and on your level of dedication, devotion, or plain crazy obsession with *Disgaea* and the loser Prinnies.

Teresa Dun

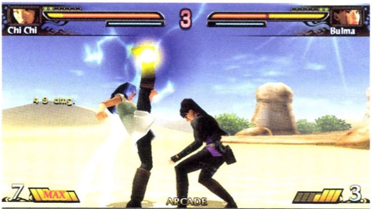
★★



You get a thousand lives. On the Standard difficulty, you can get hit three times before your life is used up. On the Hell's Finest difficulty, one hit and you're tossed back to the latest checkpoint. Pick Standard. Just trust me.



Once upon a time, I liked how cutely pathetic Prinnies were. Not anymore. And no amount of hidden collectibles or pretty art can change that.



If the background were any sparser, it'd be bald. On PSP, too! Waste!

Dragonball: Evolution

"Degradation," not "Evolution"

PSP PRICE: $39.99 ESRB: Everyone 10+ PUBLISHER: Namco Bandai DEVELOPER: Dimps

Math is supposed to be empirically dependable: *Dragonball* + fighting game = simple fun. But toss in a live-action movie adaptation, and somehow the end sum becomes the pitiable result that is *Dragonball: Evolution.*

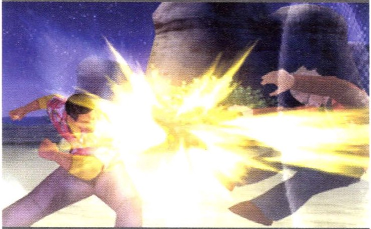
The core one-on-one fighting is incredibly simple. The characters' move-sets are too similar, and strategy and skill aren't as important as buttonmashing. Perhaps the developers wanted the controls to be "friendly," but it just feels dumbed down; even the special moves can be activated with just a face + direction dual-button tap.

Then there's the roster, which features a paltry 11 characters. It matches the cast of the film, but it's a pittance compared to the lush line-up in other *DBZ* fighters. And the graphics? Plain + boring. The fighters behave more like polygonal actors on a set than warriors locked in mortal arena combat.

And finally, there's the story mode, the worst feature. It reveals the plot—same plot as the movie—through fights and static images of actors explaining action you never see. It's extraordinarily cheap. The game isn't offensively awful, but with the approximately 8,000 quality *DBZ* titles out there, it is utterly unneeded.

Henry Gilbert

★½



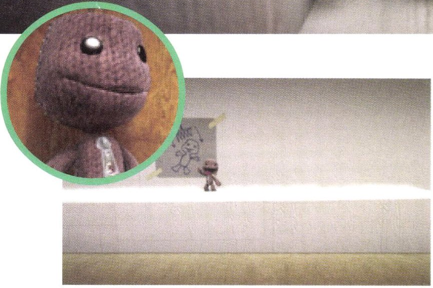
Okay, seriously, this is a PSone render, right?! Graphics aren't everything, but sadly, *Evolution's* gameplay is as lackluster as this screen.

Buffy the Vampire Slayers' Spike, James Marsters, plays Piccolo in *Dragonball: Evolution*, though the part nearly went to Ron Perlman, aka Hellboy.

14 GOLDEN RULES FOR MAKING **LITTLE-BIGPLANET LEVELS**

The must-know expertise you can't afford to miss

You can do anything in *LittleBigPlanet.* Which is a pretty daunting prospect. Making your work stand out might seem impossible, but following a few simple rules will increase the chances of your work getting noticed, played, and hearted. This isn't a creation guide—the in-game tutorials do a fine job of explaining how everything works. Instead, these guidelines will make sure you build smarter while making your levels more fun to play. Your rise to fabric-based power begins here.

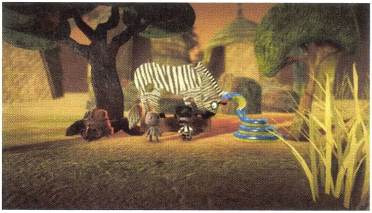


1 Never make it up as you go along

There's nothing wrong with messing about and experimenting. It's a good way to learn. However, try finish a level with no concrete plan at the start and you'll end up with an amateurish result.

Sketch out a few ideas first. It doesn't have to be an architectural schematic, just a rough doodle to decide what's going where. What shape is your level? Where are the hazards going? It's vital to think about this if you want to get the pacing and space requirements spot on—you don't want all the good stuff crammed in one spot while tumbleweeds blow through the rest of your creation.

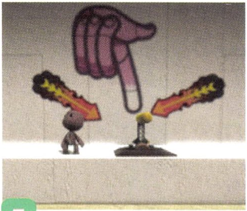
The more effort you put into designing a level before you start building, the easier it'll be to create, and the better the final result.



2 Have a theme

Anyone can build a few platforms, scatter a few spikes, and call it a day. What will really make your creation sing is a sense of visual unity. It'll feel far more approachable than a messy collection of random stickers and objects. Are you in a jungle? Space? A parking lot? Just a few design ideas will help bring everything together and create a more professional finish.

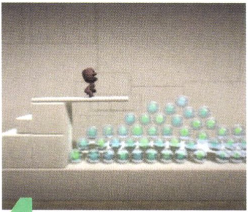
Varied use of color and lighting will also help break things up. Mix up dark and light, or open spaces with claustrophobic tunnels to create the illusion of different areas and zones. This will add variety, draw users to see what's next, and keep them playing.



3 Tell them what to do

You've spent months designing and testing your level, but you get savaged with poor feedback. Why? Partly because people are idiots, but mostly because they can't read your mind.

You may think a route, puzzle, or challenge is obvious after hundreds of hours of work, but to everyone else, your world is a strange and mysterious place. The easiest way to guide people is with arrows. But it's crude, so if you prefer subtlety, use light or color. Like moths, people will be drawn in by a well-placed patch of illumination or shift in color. Point bubbles also work well as breadcrumbs.



4 Reward people

Players might admire your artistic design, your creative flair, or clever use of spring-loaded platforms, but what they really want is to win. So give people plenty of point bubbles. Don't scatter a few around like hotel pillow mints. Leave huge piles, or long combo-tastic runs worth of them to let folks rack up huge numbers. It's a simple trick, but the more you reward someone the happier they'll be.

5 Save. A lot.

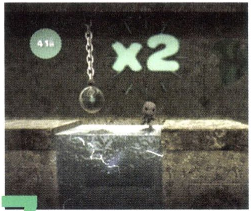
This is obvious, really. Mistakes can be fixed, details can be tweaked or rebuilt, but if a level crashes and you haven't saved for hours then you'll feel pain like you've never felt before. So save all the time. After every change if you can.

To be extra safe, copy a level to different patches on your moon occasionally so if something catastrophic happens you have an unsullied back up. You can also publish locked, unplayable levels to store them online. So even if your PS3 catches fire and melts, your work will be safe.

6 Never use copyrighted material

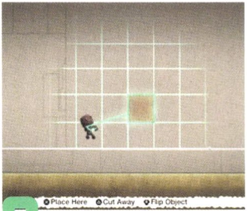
Whatever you may think, the fact remains that "copyright" means literally "the right to copy." If you don't have that right and use *Watchmen* pictures or *Killzone* game art to decorate a level, it could get pulled. Pout all you want, but if it comes down to a shouting match between you and a corporate legal department, guess who's going to win?

Direct copying of other people's material just isn't worth the risk. And anyway, why aren't you creating your own ideas? If you must build a *Metal Gear* tribute then make it "in the style of"—if the character details and look are sufficiently different, you might get away with it.



7 Play other people's levels

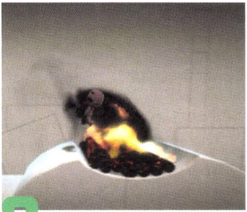
What? You think you're the only one with ideas? All those other creations out there aren't just for show; they're a valuable resource packed with inspiration. It could be a clever idea for using switches or an ingenious way to utilize checkpoints. Whatever it is, you'll learn loads by seeing what other people are doing. What makes one level boring and another fun? What makes you stop playing? Or carry on? Ask these questions as you play other gamers' work and you'll be an *LBP* level master in no time.



8 Use the grid

In the pause menu and you'll see the option to choose a small, medium, or large grid. This provides a graph paper-like backing that the cursor will snap to. The large grid actually depicts the distance a Sackboy can comfortably jump. Vertically, it's one square up and horizontally, it's three squares across.

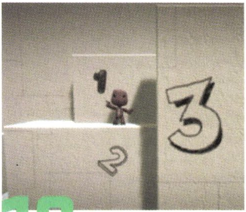
Grid mode makes it easier to construct elements precisely as separate blocks can touch each other without joining together like they would in free-build mode. For extra precision, use Front View, which flattens the perspective to 2D, making it easier to line up objects. Game View switches things back to normal.



9 Test and test again

Like point 3 ("Tell them what to do"), when you've been working on your game for months, it's easy to lose perspective. You might make a certain jump every time because you've done it a hundred times, but for a first-timer, it could be an insurmountable challenge requiring nerves of steel and pixel-perfect timing.

Poor gameplay sucks the fun out the room like world politics, which is why real developers spend a fortune on testing and tuning. So get your friends involved—ask anyone you can find to have a play and see what happens. The more you test it the better it'll be.



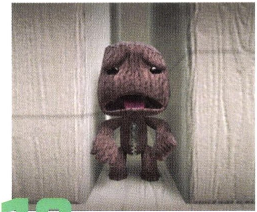
10 Use layers effectively

LittleBigPlanet might look two-dimensional but don't forget that there are three distinct planes to use. If you only build on one layer, the action can quickly get boring. Add variety by dropping in a few columns to force the player to move in and out of the screen, or place emitters to fire flaming rocks across all three layers at different intervals to create a simple 3D hazard.

Sackboys can't jump down from the front layer, which is useful for restricting movement. Or use thinner, plywood-like sheets instead of blocks for scenery so players can't stand on them and reach areas they weren't meant to.

11 Check your checkpoints

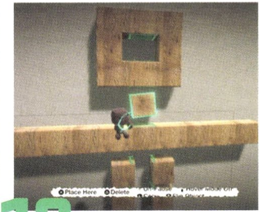
Remember that game where you died and had to play a massive chunk of it all over again? Sucked didn't it? So don't do it in your levels. Stick checkpoints everywhere. Especially after any lethal hazards or intentionally difficult bits. You need some space between checkpoints to create a challenge but as a rule of thumb, never have them more than a screen-width apart. Checkpoints should reward players and keep them moving forwards rather than punishing them with a journey back to the start. And no one's going to complain that you have too many checkpoints.



12 Be prepared/ assume the worst

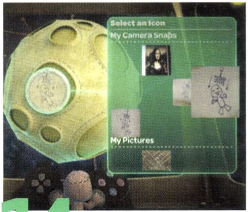
This covers just about everything from bad feedback to unexpected mistakes. Firstly, if you do publish a level and get criticized, don't declare war. Take a breath, look at what's been said, and see what you can do about it. If you are building things for other people to play then you have to listen to them.

Also, be prepared for major fixes and repairs. People will get stuck, fall behind the scenery, or screw things up in some way you never anticipated or expected. All you can do is learn, adapt, and move on from your mistakes. That way you won't repeat them.



13 Use Pause Mode when building

Tap up on the D-pad and you'll freeze everything. You can still build, but it's a bit like being Hiro Nakamura from *Heroes* because everything hangs in the air unless you move it. It's vital when constructing machines and other complicated objects because nothing moves. Hazards, lifts, and motorized vehicles will all stay put while you work. The physics engine is also shut down so nothing will fall over or roll away. Try not to go too long without unpausing though, just to ensure that everything is working and you haven't made any mistakes that will only show up when it all starts moving again.



14 Promote your published level

How do you make your finished level stand out from the multitude? Give it a good name for starters—"Mike's Level" isn't going to attract anyone. "The Apocalyptic Badger Pit" on the other hand at least piques your interest. And keep descriptions short as you need to catch people's interest in the first sentence.

Also, avoid using in-game stickers when making a badge—it looks generic. Use the camera option in the Sticker bag to take an action-representative image instead. Put up some Photo Booths (from the Tools bag) as well to automatically take pictures of the best bits, which then appear in the description box.

WATCHMEN

Submit a video to PTOM on why you love our magazine and be entered to win one of the twenty Watchmen DVDs below. Send your YouTube links or videos to PTOMMktg@futureus.com by April 30, 2009. We know you love us. In these hard economic times, this is the perfect time to show us some love!

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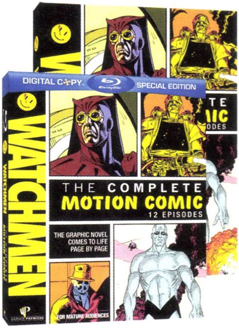

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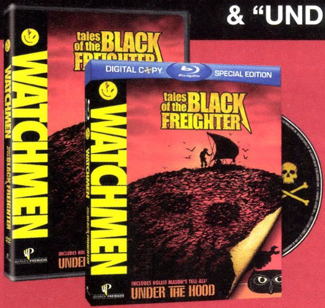
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PlayStation Network Games

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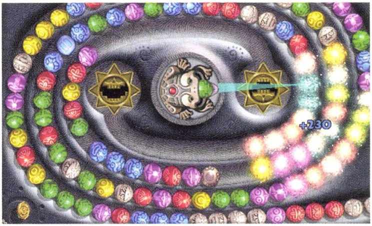
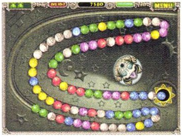


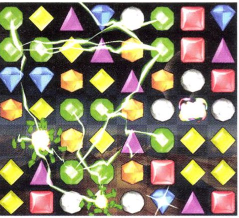


Zuma

PRICE: $9.99 **DEVELOPER:** PopCap

+ Ever seen the marbles of a Newton's Cradle toy clack back and forth on someone's desk, the momentum of one ball cascading through the others to cause movement? *Zuma's* a bit like that. As one colored marble enters the stage, the row of marbles ahead of it is nudged down a path toward the exit. Your job is to shoot marbles into the path—building combos by matching multiple same-colored marbles—and clear them all before they reach the exit. The challenge stems from the design of the pathways, which twist and interweave, and as I progressed from stage to stage, I discovered the gameplay was repetitive...yet utterly mesmerizing. In this PS3 version, the graphics have been upgraded and there are two modes (Adventure, which progresses from stage to stage, and Gauntlet, which asks you to survive on a single stage as long as possible). But be aware: the Trophies are difficult to unlock and mastering *Zuma* takes patience, reflexes, and quick thinking. But if you're building a PS3 puzzle game collection, *Zuma* is one of the classics. Teresa Dun

Galaxy One
WARP TO PLANET
Toroid X
CLOSE MAP
Toroid X - 1
This world has a Checkerboard theme.
Solve 4 of the 5 puzzles to go to the next world.



MENU
HINT
UNDO

1,145
MENU
HINT

Bejeweled 2

PRICE: $9.99 **DEVELOPER:** PopCap

+ I'm like a school kid: I'm attracted to secrets, shiny objects, and bright colors. So I can't stop playing *Bejeweled 2* on the PS3, which has *all* of the above, including five hidden game modes and shiny, high-res gems (yummy). If you're not familiar with the "match-three" mechanics of *Bejeweled*—only one of *the most popular* puzzle games of this decade—you're not worth the time. (Okay, *fine,* swap gems to line up three-in-a-row. They'll disappear, earning you points, and new ones drop to fill in the space. Happy?) The variety of game modes (timed, endless, puzzle, etc.) provide plenty of content, but perhaps the best addition to *Bejeweled 2* is its Trophies. Most are simple to earn, two require a lot of patience and luck, but the single Gold Trophy is ridiculously cheap! You just have to beat Puzzle mode, which *seems* hard until you realize you can Hint your way through the entire thing, step by step! (Warning: you might hate yourself in the morning.) For 10 bucks, *Bejeweled 2* is a treasure for puzzle fans and Trophy whores alike.

Teresa Dun

MAKING HOME HOMEY

Still trying to carve out a cozy little niche for yourself in Home? These goodies might help:

Street Fighter IV Costumes

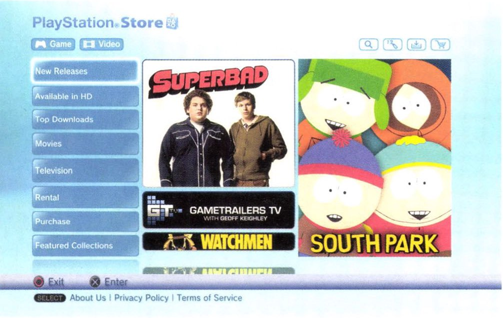
Dress up! Home will never be comfortable unless you're confident in yourself. And what better way to build confidence than to dress as a character from *Street Fighter?* Be a Chun Li, Ryu, Guile, or Ken look-alike. Oh, and girls (or those with girl avatars), doesn't wearing these outfits make you wish you could actually kick the virtual butts of all the creeps following you around in Home?

Warhawk Game Space

Admire holographic vehicle displays, read up on *Warhawk* tips and tricks, or plan out strategies on a Sand Table in the *Warhawk* game space. A perfect haunt for *Warhawk* fans. The caveat: to utilize the Sand Tables, yes, you still have to wait your turn. So if you've got your own clan and are hoping to strategize, expect eavesdroppers.

Siren Game Space

This is Japan-only for now...but you can still check it out if you create a Japanese PSN account. The *Siren* game space will include *Siren*-inspired mini-games, like forcing your avatar to escape from a hospital. Chilling. And awesome! We're definitely going to try it.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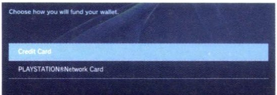
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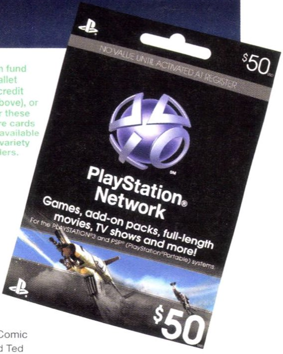
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Get your download on at the PlayStation Store

You know you can access the PlayStation Network for free. Aside from the games that we feature every month, we're also going to let you know about the latest video content available. We'll have interviews with the principles involved in the latest movies and TV shows to hit the Network, and news on plans for the months ahead.

PlayStation Store cards (in $20 and $50 denominations) are available at a bunch of retail outlets now, or use the tried and true credit card method to top up your funds. PSN now has a variety of methods of funding your account, allowing you options such as automatically pinging your credit card on any purchase, or placing up to $150 in your wallet to use at your leisure.

Among the latest new additions to the Video Delivery Service is the highest-rated videogame show currently on TV, *Gametrailers TV with Geoff Keighley.* All 30 episodes of season one are available, and season two is updated regularly. Each episode can be downloaded in standard definition for $1.99.

This was all a perfect lead-in to chatting with Keighley, the most prominent videogame journalist in the industry today, about videogame TV, and getting his thoughts on the progress that Sony has made and its opportunities for the future.

Your Host

How much coverage of the top PS3 games can viewers expect in the shows?

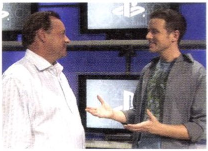
We are constantly covering PlayStation 3 games, and in most cases revealing the first gameplay footage anywhere in the world. For instance in the months to come you'll see shows on PS3 exclusives like *God of War III* and *Uncharted 2.* And these aren't just trailers. In every case we go to the development studios to ask the team the tough questions our viewers want answered.

Gamers do have *some* TV show viewing options, so what does *Gametrailers TV* bring to the mix to make it stand out?

Our show's formula is simple: Give us a half hour and we will show you videogames you've never seen before. Our show is built around world-exclusive game trailers and reveals. Our show works because it's so jam-packed with exclusive new game footage that you feel compelled to pause your game.

Who's your favorite games-industry personality to interview (and why)?

Part of what makes my job so fun is that I get to interview an eclectic bunch of characters. Examples include Triumph the Insult Comic Dog, Kiefer Sutherland, and Ted Price from Insomniac. Still, I probably have the most fun interviewing *God of War* creator David Jaffe. Last year I bet him $100 on camera that Ken Kutaragi, the father of the PlayStation, was a close watcher of his career. (Jaffe strongly doubted it). So then I asked Kutaragi-san about Jaffe—and of course he knew all about him.



Keighley gets face time with top industry leaders, like SCEA President, Jack Tretton.

Do you have a particular favorite episode?

Our show is filmed on location so we get to go on a lot of fun adventures. One of my favorite episodes was based on the *Bourne Conspiracy* game. I learned how to do a complete movie stunt sequence with Jeff Imada, the stunt director of the film. Four of his stunt guys attacked me and I had to defend myself. I looked like a total badass on the show.

As a longtime videogame industry journalist, what's your personal take on PS3 performance so far?

Let's face it, price has been the biggest challenge for Sony this generation. Add in the worst recession in recent memory and it's not exactly great to have the highest priced console. On the positive side Sony has the best first-party exclusive software lineup this generation. If you own a PS3 there are lots of great games to play.

What's been Sony's most successful move and what needs fixing?

Continual investment in internally developed software. Sony was right to focus on homegrown hits as opposed to trying to buy up third-party exclusives. Sony seems to have a huge lineup over the next 18 to 24 months. (And let's not forget *LittleBigPlanet* and *Killzone 2).* For what still needs to be addressed, online continues to be a challenge. I must say that Peter Dille and The PlayStation Network team have done an incredible job over the past few years closing the gap. But there is more work to be done. ■

Letters

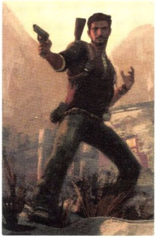
Feedback, Insight, Man Issues, and *Poetry!?*

"Many female characters in games are nothing more than laughable parodies of the female body, with gargantuan breasts and slender waists.">>

WE ARE BUT MEN

This is a response to Marissa's letter [Boob Tube] published in the March '09 issue. I agree with the fact there are not a whole lot of games on the market right now that feature a female character in the lead role. I will also concede that there are many female characters in games that are nothing more than laughable parodies of the female body, with gargantuan breasts and slender waists. However, don't you think that guys in videogames have it a little rough also? Personally, my body type could best be described as a square circle, and yet every time I turn on a game featuring a male lead, the guy is tall, brooding, square-jawed, and sporting enough muscles to take down a bull elephant with a flick of the wrist. Don't forget that it's a two-way street.

Andrew Walz, via email



What hope do ye mere mortals have when games and PTOM editors set the manliness standard so high?

Well, Andrew, seeing as all four male members of the PTOM staff are as chiseled and tanned as Greek gods, we feel that the average male videogame character is actually relatively true-to-life. However, we can definitely understand how those who lack our rugged and masculine good looks might feel that the uniform handsomeness of these characters is an unfair exaggeration. Your point is a valid one.

LETTER OF THE MONTH

RESULTS MAY VARY

I used to pick up a game and play through to have fun and discover things on my own. I avoided hint books because I wanted to experience and discover things naturally—to solve the game on my own terms. I was happily minding my own business, playing *Fallout 3* when the Trophy patch arrived...and that changed everything.

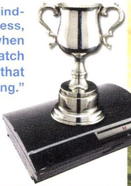
Suddenly, I had to go back and re-do a ton of quests. I had to choose different perks to make it easier to acquire different Trophies. I had to call a friend to ask how to trigger that last behemoth. I read online walkthroughs to figure out how to get one of the Trophies I was missing. Saving and reloading to try and get something just perfect has become a sick compulsion.

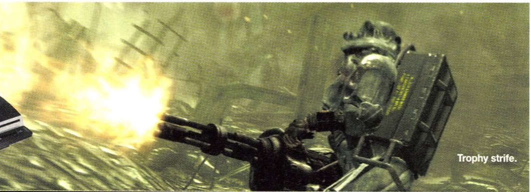
In the end, I have my *Fallout 3* Platinum Trophy. But was it worth it? I've pulled ahead of my friend in Trophies, but also feel the fevered compulsion to stay ahead. I've found myself only playing games that have Trophies, and yet I realize I'm missing out on great games I own like *Valkyria Chronicles* because I'm waiting and hoping they'll receive a Trophy patch someday.

Andy, via email

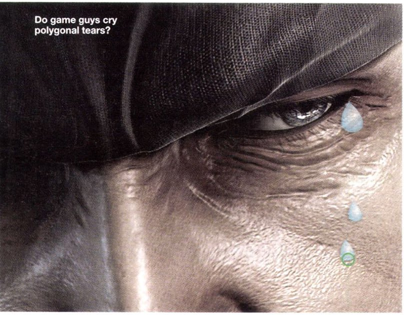
Do you feel an uncontrollable urge to gather collectible items that have no practical in-game application? Do you engage in severely underwhelming online multiplayer simply to meet an arbitrary "matches played" requirement? Do you experience chronic sweaty palms, blurred vision, or seek virtual validation? If so, you may be suffering from a chronic affliction known as "Trophy Whoring," a non-fatal disease that affects nine out of every 10 gamers. Trophy Whoring prays on gamers' natural instinct to accomplish any asinine task set before them, forcing them to invest hours of their lives in essentially meaningless challenges. There may not be a cure for Trophy Whoring, but there is help. To learn how to manage your symptoms, email PTOM_Letters@futureus.com with your best/worst examples of Trophy Whoring.

"I was happily minding my own business, playing *Fallout 3* when the Trophy patch arrived...and that changed everything."





Trophy strife.


Do game guys cry polygonal tears?

METAL GEAR SPOILER

So I've started playing *Metal Gear* again, number four in particular, and I am not embarrassed one bit to admit that during the return to Shadow Moses, I almost cried. It was an extremely moving scene, going back to where Snake's journey began, and just seeing how age had affected the place was truly fantastic. When I told my friends this, they laughed at me. But they all hopped onto the *MGS* bandwagon for number four—none of them have played the others. So this makes me wonder: Am I the only one nearly driven to tears while playing *MGS4?*

David Wians, via email

Pssh, cry? David, we don't... Okay, yeah, we totally cried. But seriously, don't tell anyone. We've got a rep to maintain thanks to our manly good looks.

PS ELIOT?

My PS3, my PS3,
Always makes me happy
With games with such variety.

From its brightly colored lights,
To games, action, strategy, fight,
To endless hours in nite.

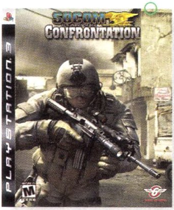
Online play allows people to meet,
Although some people are hard to beat,
This is what makes the PS3 a delectable treat.

Now that my poem is done,
I hope you'll have fun,
Because the PlayStation 3 is number one.

Skyler, via email

Your letter, your letter,
Could not have been better
With rhymes flowing so unfettered.

But seriously?
A poem for your PS3?
Your girlfriend must think you're craze-ee.



WHAT, NO WIFI?

I am stationed in Balad, Iraq. I've been here for about seven months, and with my Posttraumatic Stress Disorder starting to kick in, the only time I get to feel like I am back home is when I am playing my PS3. During my adventures via various missions throughout the country, I try to make it to the local PX in search of new PS3 games. Sadly, there aren't many to go around. Once in a while, they get a truckload in, but a week afterwards all the good ones are gone. The situation gets worse when you start talking about Downloadable Content, PS3 updates, and games that require Internet to play. So I guess the point of this letter is to ask Sony if maybe they could put their game/system updates on CD. Maybe they could even include some of their PSN games on there as a selling bonus. Yeah, crazy idea but this place will do that to you!

PO2 Jose Blanco,
US Coast Guard

Don't count on the PS3 firmware updates being released on discs anytime soon, Jose (largely due to the potential for the files to be hacked for nefarious reasons). PSN games, however, are not a bad idea. We doubt you'll ever see them sold individually, but a "best of" collection isn't out of the question. Hopefully, Sony will continue to release some games online *and* on Blu-ray like they did with *Warhawk* and *SOCOM.* Anyway, stay safe until you're back gaming in the USA.

OPERATORS ARE STANDING BUY!

Where could I find a list of all the games you fine people have reviewed along with the scores you have given them? When I decide if I should rent or buy a game, I want to turn to you. So where is this info?

Arthur Casas, via email

You know, it just so happens that we recently finished up a brand new special issue that includes our reviews of every single PS3 game released to date (all lovingly edited and adjusted to a uniform 10 point scale) along with a number of other fun features. It's on store shelves now, so go out and buy buy buy! And thank you, Arthur, for this tremendous opportunity to shamelessly promote our products.

PLAYSTATION 3
ULTIMATE REVIEW GUIDE
COMPLETE COLLECTIBLE GUIDE
EVERY GAME, EVERY GENRE
198 GAMES REVIEWED
SEXY LADIES OF PS3
RESIDENT EVIL 5 REVIEWED
+ KILLER GAMES OF 2009

THIS READER'S GOT BRAAAINS!

The Review Intro page of our March issue fell prey to a zombie infestation! Fortunately, Peter Martinez was able to use his extensive knowledge of the undead to correctly identify all of the invaders. Congratulations Peter! Free crap from Rob's desk is headed your way.

"All zombie movies. Fitting, since you guys got to play *Resident Evil 5* before me (I will never, ever forgive you). As for the random junk off your desk, Rob: you wouldn't happen to have a couple hundreds lying around, would you? P.S. Okay fine, I forgive you.

The top image is from most hilarious zombie movie of all time, *Shaun of the Dead.*

The second image is even easier to name. It's a snapshot of Romero's timeless classic, *Night of the Living Dead,* which is the foundation on which all zombie movies have since been built.

The bottom image depicts Jill Valentine (as played by Sienna Guillory) in *Resident Evil: Apocalypse,* the second movie in the *Resident Evil* film franchise."

– Peter Martinez

ASK KRATOS

Do you know any E-rated games like *God of War* and *GoW II?* Dad won't let me play them. OH THE NERVE!!!!!!!!

Brandon, via email

FOOLISH CHILD! NEVER COULD SUCH A GAME POSSIBLY CONVEY WRATH SUCH AS MINE. I WILL NOT REST UNTIL THE BLOOD OF THE GODS STAINS THE PEAK OF OLYMPUS AND ALL THE WORLD DESCENDS INTO CHAOS, AND YET YOU ASK OF ME ADVICE ON YOUR PUERILE ENDEAVORS? ONLY WHEN YOUR FAMILY HAS BEEN MERCILESSLY CAST ASUNDER COULD YOU BEGIN TO EXPERIENCE MY TRUE PAIN!

PTOM POPULARITY CONTEST

Hey, you! Yes, you reading this! We want to know what your favorite section of the magazine is. Previews, Reviews, The 10 (how're you liking that, by the way?), Et Cetera, Qore codes, Letters, what? Email us at PTOM_Letters@futureus.com with the subject line "Favorite Part of PTOM" and let us know!

A SIGHT FOR SORE EARS

I am profoundly deaf, and I would like to know: where can I obtain versions of PSN movies with English subtitles? Or can you please tell me if Sony plans to add English subtitles to each of their movies on PSN in the future? Since many deaf and hearing-impaired people like myself own a PS3, Sony should support us by making all the movies available with English subtitles. This would not only make us very happy but would increase the company's sales for this audience.

Brittany Branch-Smith,
Washington DC

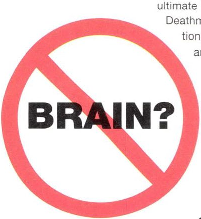
That's a tough question, Brittany, and unfortunately, no one we contacted at Sony could say anything more than that it's being looked into. But we'll keep asking and publish updates if new details emerge.

LETTER FAIL

Playstation Magazine has officially been owned like a newb with a ultimate head shot to the face by Deathmarchdelta the Playstation slayer...on *Call of Duty 4* and 5...and the magazine. Love you piece.

Chase, via email

Um...love you too?



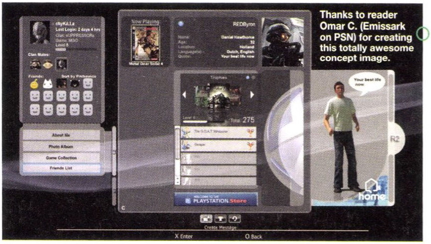
PLAYER 1
SCORE 00082800
K.O.
53
PRESS 2P START
CPU
Gouken
SUPER!

COUCH SURFING IS A TWO PLAYER GAME

What has happened to gaming? Playing videogames used to be a way to get together with your friends and play a huge variety of games. Now you sit at home alone playing strangers in FPS games. I think this is ridiculous! I would rather play games with friends in person so I can trash talk to their faces. Game developers only care about 60-player online battles or how many stupid little game types they can create out of a FPS. Why can't game developers concentrate on pleasing both parties? I don't want special treatment for offline multiplayer, but I do want *something.*

Jay, via email

Back when we were reviewing *Pure,* two of our editors sat down for some splitscreen racing and were shocked and saddened by the absence of any kind of local multiplayer component. A few months later, the same two editors were sitting side by side with arcade sticks in their hands joyously beating the crap out of each other in *Street Fighter IV.* Moral of the story? We miss local multiplayer too!



Thanks to reader Omar C. (Emissark on PSN) for creating this totally awesome concept image.

THE PROFILE BLUES

I'm saddened by the user profiles for PSN. Where is the "games recently played" add-on? Or even a "games owned" page that you could turn off if you wanted to keep that private? Where is my custom avatar (possibly uploaded via the console) for my profile? Will PSN ever add more content to our ever so bland profiles?

Andrew, via email

Frankly, Andrew, you've got more questions than we have answers. But wouldn't it be awesome if our PSN ID Cards looked like... *this.*

WAR...

I just finished reading Rob Smith's review of *Killzone 2* [Feb. '09 issue], and while overall I found it to be well-written and informative, I was annoyed by the clearly liberal slant found in the opening paragraph wherein the author questions whether "good guys invade other territories."

contact Send your thoughts and comments to PTOM_Letters@futureus.com. Because we've got all these pages to fill...*every* month!

WAR...
...AND PEACE

The answer to this question is a resounding, "YES!" It has been done time and time again throughout history. On June 6, 1944 (otherwise known as D-Day) the Allied forces invaded France in order to end the war that Adolf Hitler started. In December 1989, the United States under President George H. W. Bush invaded Panama to depose Manuel Noriega after the liberal media labeled him a "wimp" for failing to intervene in that country. Bill Clinton thought it wise to invade Somalia in 1993 in order to capture Mohamed Farrah Aidid with notoriously dire consequences. These are but a few examples throughout American history alone.

In the future keep your leftist propaganda out of the magazine. If I wanted to read about liberal agendas I'd subscribe to *The New York Times.*

Jose, via email

Jose, at moments such as these, we feel that it appropriate to relay the sage advice of songwriter Edwin Starr, who said: *"War? HUH! What is good for? Absolutely nothing! Sing it again. War? HUH! What is it good for? Absolutely nothing! Good God, y'all."* Wise words indeed. Think about it...

...AND PEACE

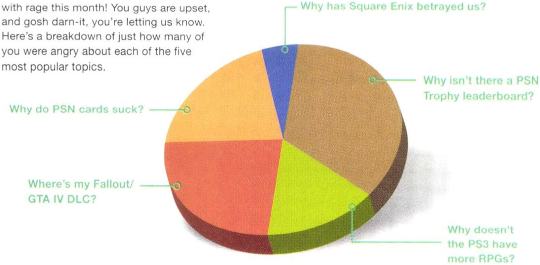
I am sick and tired of this feud between Xbox and PS3. The name-calling is getting way old. I am a gamer—A GAMER—I have respect for all systems that offer me gaming entertainment, and both the Xbox 360 and PS3 (even the Wii sometimes) offer an equal amount of quality gaming entertainment and both have excellent online stores. Who wouldn't want to play *Killzone 2* AND *Gears of War* (AND *Zelda*)? So can't we all get along? I enjoy having in-depth, long-winded conversations about any game on any system (let's not forget PC), and I can't be the only one.

RoyallFreshness, via email

See, this is what Edwin was talking about. Give peace a chance, kids!

PIE CHART OF OUR DISCONTENT

Our inboxes were absolutely overflowing with rage this month! You guys are upset, and gosh darn-it, you're letting us know. Here's a breakdown of just how many of you were angry about each of the five most popular topics.



PIXEL PERFECT

Whoever said games can't be art has never met readers Mike Amos and Shane Palmer. Their homemade recreations of seminal PlayStation characters—painstakingly crafted from action figures and LEGO pieces, respectively—are a testament to the awesome power of games and the creativity they inspire. Now marvel at their three-dimensional masterpieces!

Behold Mike's rendition of Barret from *FFVII*. Not pictured: badass gun.

The hand-painted details on Mike's Welkin model are truly impressive.

Shane spent eight months building Metal Gear Rex from scratch!

Presented by the PlayStation Network

Qore host Veronica Belmont

QORE EPISODE 09

Featuring Resident Evil 5, The Godfather II, and MLB 09: The Show

Welcome to the ninth episode of Qore! This month we have a few surprises up our sleeve for you, including some brand-new technology built into Qore. Plus, we finally got Veronica into a bikini on this show...well, an avatar of her, anyhow. Here's the rundown!

***Resident Evil 5* in QoreVision**
With all the talk about the co-op game play in *Resident Evil 5*, the Qore team has developed a sweet new way for you to experience it. Using your PS3 controller, you can switch between character viewpoints in real-time during our walkthrough to better understand the strategies involved.

The Godfather II
Making a game based upon one of the most beloved movies in cinematic history is a huge challenge, but for *The Godfather II*, Veronica Belmont discovered that the developers at Electronic Arts captured the spirit of the film with sizzling blackhand combat enhancements and the new "Don's View."

Pitchers and Catchers Report
With baseball's spring training underway this month, Audrey Cleo reports on the new features and gorgeous visuals of *MLB 09: The Show*.

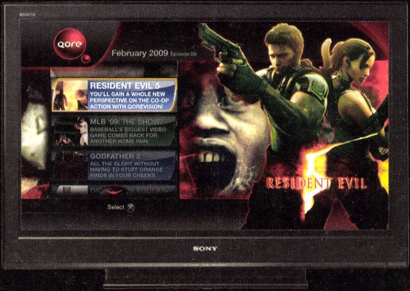
Digital Destruction
At LucasArts in San Francisco, the Qore team breaks down the animated magic of Digital Molecular Matter—the unique technology used to create realistic destruction in *Star Wars: The Force Unleashed.*

As for downloadable content, we've got two new exclusive *Killzone 2* themes!

Enjoy the show!

MLB 09: The Show

Resident Evil 5

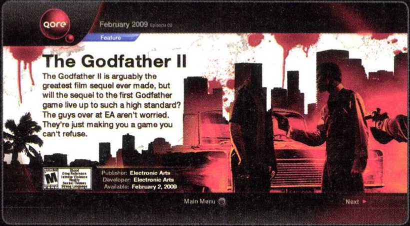

February 2009 Episode 09

RESIDENT EVIL 5
YOU'LL GAIN A WHOLE NEW PERSPECTIVE ON THE CO-OP ACTION WITH QOREVISION!

MLB '09: THE SHOW
BASEBALL'S BIGGEST VIDEO GAME COMES BACK FOR ANOTHER HOME RUN.

GODFATHER 2
ALL THE GLORY WITHOUT HAVING TO STUFF ORANGE RINDS IN YOUR CHEEKS.

The Godfather II


February 2009 Episode 09

Feature

The Godfather II

The Godfather II is arguably the greatest film sequel ever made, but will the sequel to the first Godfather game live up to such a high standard? The guys over at EA aren't worried. They're just making you a game you can't refuse.

Publisher: Electronic Arts
Developer: Electronic Arts
Available: February 2, 2009

TO REDEEM YOUR CODE: On the PlayStation Network tab, select Account Management, then select Redeem Codes from the menu.

Enter the code below into the three boxes, then select Continue. Now hit Continue and Accept the download. Sit back and enjoy!

BCNT-4TBG-TGK7

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